

INTERPRETING CULTURE IN A SCOTTISH CONGREGATION

An Ethnographic and Theological Approach

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DECLARATION

I certify that the following thesis is my original work. It is the product of part-time research carried out at the Divinity Faculty of the University of Edinburgh from October 1992 to April 1997.

Alan Dowie

29 April 1997

FOR KIRSTEEN

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Abstract

In recent Practical Theology there has been an increasing interest in the application of hermeneutical theories. While the object domain of hermeneutics is primarily associated with literature and language, it is also possible to speak of the interpretation of situations. One type of social situation which practical theologians have treated as an interpretative context is that of congregations, and the impetus for such studies lies in the value of theology constructed around the experience of these communities.

The focus of this thesis is congregational culture in the setting of a Scottish local church, and the research question concerns the ways in which congregants experience their culture. Since the interpretation of culture in communities is the specialisation of Social Anthropology, this research adopts a qualitative empirical approach consisting of participant observation and ethnographic interviews.

In contrast to other examples of congregational studies, the significance of this research lies in taking cues from the particularity of the field setting itself rather than assuming preformulated structures. Central to congregational culture at Riverstane Church are the symbolic boundaries which delimit the relationship between insiders and outsiders, as well as the relationships between insiders themselves. These boundaries are associated with the church building, the social segmentation within the congregation, and the status economy of its micro-politics. Further, the symbolic boundaries are accompanied by mutually reinforcing cycles in the social processes of the congregation. These are: difference towards other social entities; deference to authority, tradition, and status; and dissonance resulting

from the tension between the congregation's collective sense of self and the reality of congregational decline.

Theologically, these congregational boundaries have a bearing upon congregational mission, and the biblical concept of philoxenia, or hospitality to strangers, is seen as a key to possible transformation. Finally, attention to the horizon of personal boundaries arising from the narcissistic orientation of congregational culture at Riverstane Church suggests an approach to pastoral care based upon the quality of 'interpathy' as a modified form of empathy.

Preface

Every congregation is in certain respects

- a. like all other congregations,
- b. like some other congregations,
- c. like no other congregation.

(Adapted from Kluckhohn and Murray, 1953: 53).

Riverstane Church is in certain respects like all other, like some other, and like no other churches with regard to the generality, typicality, and particularity of congregational culture.

Riverstane is like all other congregations in terms of its continuity with Christian tradition, and this is bound up with congregational culture. Riverstane is like some other congregations in its cultural features which shed light on other churches at a comparative level. Riverstane is like no other congregation in the cultural uniqueness of its social, historical, and local contingencies.

There is good reason to make congregations the focus of practical theological reflection. In the first place it helps to redress a discontinuity which is sometimes perceived to lie between church and theological academy. One way of responding to this is to engage in empirical, interdisciplinary studies, and that is part of the motivation behind this thesis. Moreover, congregations are increasingly being seen as a practical theological resource, as reflected for example in a recent article by John Stewart, who agrees that critical Practical Theology "might find its prime locus in congregational studies" (1996: 87).

The primary research question of this thesis is: How do members of Riverstane Church experience congregational culture? However, other questions are prior to this. In

what sense is the term 'culture' being used? Do churches, in fact, have cultures? If so, what does congregational culture consist of? As a phenomenon, how is it to be accounted for? How can it be studied? What can it tell us? Culture is a difficult idea which looks easy, and its usage without adequate consideration of its content has led to disappointing results in some approaches to congregational studies. In this thesis, therefore, empirical discussion of Riverstone culture is held over until after attention has been turned to these matters.

The thesis is arranged in three parts. Part One takes the epistemological step back indicated above, in which the theme of hermeneutics provides the link between Practical Theology, the social anthropological study of culture, and the field of congregational studies. On the basis of this, the qualitative empirical component of the research is taken up in Part Two, which contains an ethnography of Riverstone Church. The account in Part Two is thoroughly ethnographic in the sense that it provides the basis for the practical theological reflection which is held over until Part Three. It is important to note that although dependent upon Part Two, the reasoning in Part Three takes a divergent rather than a convergent path, so that it abstracts from the situation at Riverstone Church in order to make statements of a broader nature. This is not a matter of arguing from the particular to the general but rather, in Zygmunt Bauman's terms, "of spotting the general in the particular" (1978: 218). Because of the interrelation of these three parts, readers without a background in ethnography, and who are perhaps consulting this thesis for reasons of interest, are advised that Part Three cannot be properly read without reference to the supporting material adduced in Part Two and to the hermeneutical perspective set out in Part One. Similarly, unless Part Two is seen in the context of the methodological discussion in Part One, the ethnography itself is liable to be misread.

Apart from the arrangement of the thesis in three parts, the chapters also are organised into parts (denoted by Roman numerals I to III). The parts themselves are in sections (capital letters A to D), and any further sub-divisions are represented by Arabic numerals (1 to 5). In order to maintain the flow of the text, and as a stylistic convention here, the use of footnotes or endnotes has not been adopted.

The argument can be summarised as follows. Chapter One highlights the essentially interpretative nature of this research and, after giving an account of some basic concepts in hermeneutics, discusses the variety of possible object domains and locates the hermeneutical background of the thesis in the tradition from Wilhelm Dilthey to Hans-Georg Gadamer. The use of hermeneutical theory in relation to Practical Theology is then considered, with particular attention to the interpretation of situations. Chapter Two follows on from this by introducing ethnography as an appropriate method for interpreting situations as cultures. The idea of culture is described in semiotic terms and the nature of ethnographic research is also outlined, since this tends to be omitted in some congregational studies. Ethnography is seen to be essentially hermeneutical in character, since hermeneutics is about making meaning, and the cultural symbols of a community are what they construct their meanings and collective sense of self around. Then an account is given in general terms of what is involved in ethnographic fieldwork, and the chapter considers matters relating to the production of ethnographic accounts, their limitations, and their assessment. Chapter Three concludes Part One by turning to the theme of congregational culture as a hermeneutical object. After discussing what is meant by the idea of congregational culture, some examples of congregational studies are considered, particularly approaches which are ethnographically oriented, and the chapter contrasts these with the ethnographic approach taken here.

In Chapter Four, Part Two opens with details of the qualitative empirical study at Riverstane Church. The researcher's horizon is outlined insofar as it relates to the interpretation of congregational culture, and the circumstances surrounding the origination of the field study are set out. Then, after describing the activity of the researcher as a participant observer, the research strategy is discussed with reference to ethnographic interviews. The chapter also comments on the analysis of ethnographic material and on the presentation of the written account. Having considered the horizon of the researcher, Chapter Five turns to the horizon of the congregation in terms of its sociohistorical context and effective history. Cultural scenes associated with gatherings at Sunday morning services are then described, introducing features of the congregation which are important for the chapters ahead, particularly social segmentation, the presence of boundaries, and the experience of dissonance. Then Chapter Six turns to the shared symbols by which a collective sense of self at Riverstane is constructed. These relate to the elements of tradition in the commitment system of the congregation, as represented in the building and the worship, together with public aspects in the way the congregation presents itself to the wider community. Part Two of the thesis is closed by Chapter Seven, which describes the emphasis on status at Riverstane Church as a further aspect of its commitment system, and upon which the social processes of the congregation are predicated. The micro-political character of organisational life is a feature which is universally experienced but rarely acknowledged formally or given proper attention. The chapter considers the ways in which an economy of status operates in the micro-politics of the congregation, particularly in meetings such as that of the kirk session, and attention is given to the symbolic boundaries around which the status economy functions.

Beginning in Chapter Eight, Part Three of the thesis takes up themes arising from the ethnography of Part Two and reflects upon these in terms of mission and the pastoral context. A brief summary of the ethnographic account is presented, and the chapter focuses on cultural factors which appear to work against congregational mission at Riverstane. In response to this the New Testament concept of philoxenia, or hospitality to strangers, is proposed as a guide towards congregational mission and potential transformation. Having considered boundaries and congregational mission, Chapter Nine concludes Part Three by taking up the theme of boundaries in the pastoral context. After discussing the archetype of statesmanship to which it seems that Riverstane ministers tend to approximate, and its relationship to a form of cultural narcissism in the congregation, the pastoral use of power is briefly considered. Then, after considering the theological significance of transfer terminology, the discussion recalls Arnold van Gennep's metaphor of transition across a threshold, and a possible reframing of this is suggested in terms of the perspective of the individual concerned, with the corresponding pastoral self-metaphor being that of 'the interpathic self'.

Material contained in Chapters Seven and Eight was presented at the inaugural New Scholars Conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists in March 1997. Some of those present, realising that 'Riverstane' is a pseudonym, suggested that they might be able to identify the church. In fact anyone who is familiar with the Church of Scotland will be able to guess the identity of Riverstane on the basis of the ethnography, since it was impossible to change any of the details with a view to disguising the identity of the congregation. As will become clear, congregational culture at Riverstane is inseparable from its particularity, and indeed the choice of 'Riverstane' as a pseudonym is descriptive of the distinctive appearance of the church with regard to its stone, as well as its location on the sloping

bank of a river. In this case, the rationale for using a pseudonym at all was more than anything else to enhance a sense of perspective in order to assist the process of reflection.

However, the fact that for some delegates at the conference the account of Riverstane was somewhat reminiscent, whether their guesses were correct or not, reflects the dimension of comparativity in this research. On this point, Anthony Cohen comments (1987: 212):

We attempt deliberately, and with intellectual rigour, to illuminate the features of one society with insights gained from the study of others...to offer an understanding of a specific society; and hence to contribute towards the stock of experience from which we understand other, quite different, circumstances.

The intention of this research is not simply to present an account of congregational culture at Riverstane Church, but also perhaps to contribute to "the stock of experience" in Practical Theology from which we understand other, quite different, congregations, on the basis that in certain respects Riverstane is indeed - on each count - like all other, like some other, and like no other congregations.

We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings
shape us.

Winston S Churchill (James, 1974: 6869)

There's nothing ill can dwell in such a temple:
If the ill spirit have so fair a house,
Good things will strive to dwell with't.

William Shakespeare, The Tempest,
Act I Scene II

A man without self-control
is like a city broken into and left without walls.

Proverbs 25.28 (RSV)

Life must be understood backwards. But...it must be
lived forwards. A principle which, the more one thinks
it through, precisely leads to the conclusion that life
in time can never properly be understood, just because
no moment can acquire the complete stillness needed to
orient oneself backwards.

Søren Kierkegaard, Papirer Vol.IV, A 164
(Hannay, 1982: 143)

Horizons which initially are centred on the individual
or corporate self may expand in such a way as to de-
centre the self. But is this not, in the Christian
tradition, the heart of the message of the cross and
the resurrection, and one of the most fundamental
functions which biblical texts can perform?

Anthony Thiselton (1992: 6)

PART ONE

Hermeneutics, Ethnography, and Congregational Studies

Hermeneutics and Practical Theology

Introduction

This thesis is concerned with interpretation. Specifically, it is concerned with the interpretation of congregational culture at Riverstane Church. The interpretation presented in the thesis can be described as social anthropological description and practical theological reflection. But it is fundamentally an interpretation, and for that reason the central theme of this chapter is hermeneutics.

What is hermeneutics? At a general level hermeneutics is the cover term for theories of interpretation. The word 'hermeneutics' is classically associated with the Greek wing-shoed deity and messenger of the gods (as well as the god of travellers, thieves, and scholars) Hermes, son of Zeus and Maia, in whose power it was to take what lies beyond human comprehension and to convey it in a form which the mind can understand. The content of hermeneutics varies according to the context in which it appears, so that hermeneutics in literary criticism, for example, is distinct from hermeneutics in, say, the social sciences. But also within individual subject areas, its content can depend on the specialisation in which the hermeneut is engaged.

Nowhere is this more the case than in theology. The biblical scholar and the systematic theologian might view hermeneutics in relation to quite separate areas of work, while the practical theologian might relate it to contexts which are different again from them both. Indeed, even within Practical Theology, hermeneutical perspectives operate in a number of ways, some of which will be described in the second part of this chapter.

The material presented here is not intended as an introduction to the field of hermeneutics or as a critical exposition of key texts and their authors. Nor does it enter into detailed discussion of hermeneutical theories. Rather, the purpose of the chapter is to clarify the sense in which the term 'hermeneutics' is used here, particularly in connection with the hermeneutical mode of the empirical work set out in Part Two of this thesis. Broadly speaking, Part Two describes aspects of congregational culture at Riverstone Church, and then Part Three brings theological reflection to bear upon the situation. However, it would be a mistake to suppose that there could be description alone in Part Two and detached evaluation in Part Three. Certainly the distinction must be made between fact and value, but in practice description itself cannot be value-free. Putting this another way, there is no hermetic seal between data and analysis, since data is only meaningful insofar as it has already been in some way analysed. It therefore becomes necessary for a properly hermeneutical approach to take these complexities into account, and the next chapter will discuss this in more detail with reference to the choice of research method for the empirical study contained in Part Two.

Historically, the field of hermeneutics developed from the study of written texts, and indeed that is its primary object domain. However, it has also been argued that hermeneutics can be extended to other types of object domain, including such non-verbal phenomena as works of art and meaningful human action. Further, to anticipate the direction which this research will take, it also becomes possible to speak of the interpretation of situations, and details of what is meant by this will be turned to in the second part of the chapter.

I. Hermeneutical Perspectives

This first section of the chapter sets out some basic ideas in hermeneutics insofar as they inform the overall perspective adopted within the context of this research. However, it does not claim to represent the only possible hermeneutical perspective. For example, it accepts as being illuminative the Kantian idea that subjects partly constitute the objects of perception (phenomena, as distinct from noumena), and that the mediating nature of language is central to the construction of meaning (perspectives found in Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer). But it does not go beyond the idea of meaning in the grounded or mundane sense to consider theological dimensions of meaning in terms of that which is revealed or extra-mundane. There is no discussion, for example, of the theological idea of meaning as imparted by God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The region of theological hermeneutics concerned with that form of meaning which is disclosed through the Word of God - the threefold form of the Word of God incarnated in Christ, contained in scripture, and proclaimed in kerygma and sacrament (Karl Barth, for example, discusses "The Word of God in its Threefold Form," 1936: 98-140) - is seen here to be separate from the focus of this research and so is not taken up in the discussion of hermeneutical perspectives.

Also, in accepting at the onset such ideas as the interplay of subject and object, and the centrality of language in constructing meaning, these positions are declared more as starting points within the perspective adopted here rather than as a statement of conclusions reached on the basis of an argument developed in this chapter. Similarly, reference to ideas associated with figures such as Wilhelm Dilthey and Hans-Georg Gadamer is generally intended in the context of this research to be illustrative rather than debative, without entering into extended discussion of their theories.

A. Fundamental Distinctions

Hermeneutics is interpretation theory. It is not interpretation itself, but is concerned instead with the process of interpretation. The need for theories of interpretation can be seen in the methodological problems encountered, for example, in understanding written texts. Although words like 'interpretation', 'understanding', 'meaning', and 'truth' are common in ordinary language, they function separately as technical terms in the field of hermeneutics. It is therefore necessary to indicate briefly how these words are used here, and how they fit together.

1. Interpretation

The helpful account of these key terms which is offered by Richard Palmer (1969) will be the main guide here. Interpretation is "the process of bringing a thing or situation from unintelligibility to understanding" (13). The three modes of interpretation are expression, explanation, and translation. First, expression relates to the event of spoken communication. The act of 'saying' is an act of interpretation. Second, explanation relates to method. This mode is an objectifying, though strictly not an objective, process. There is no absolute objectivity since the very choice of method is itself an interpretation, and any explanatory method already has a selectivity built into what it can disclose. This is true of language in general (9): "Language shapes man's seeing and his thought...even the shape of his feelings is conformed to language." Third, translation relates to "what is strange, unfamiliar, and obscure" in the object (29), and is concerned with transmuting it into accessible terms.

Each of these three modes of interpretation feature in the empirical component of this research. The articulation contained in Parts Two and Three of this thesis relates to

the mode of expression. Next, the explanatory mode relates to the choice of ethnography as a research method for studying the congregation, and this is discussed in the next chapter. Lastly, the mode of translation pertains to the fact that the account offered in this thesis is ultimately the researcher's version of the situation at Riverstane Church, and also to the fact that the concepts and terms in which it is conveyed, however rooted these may be in the actual situation, belong to the language of the researcher. Indeed it could not be otherwise, and this is a point which will be returned to below (pages 51-52).

2. Understanding

In the interpretative process, understanding is the "deciphering" of meaning (7). It is a circular, or spiral, procedure. We approach the object with a partial, prior 'understanding' which Heidegger termed 'preunderstanding'. Understanding is more than an epistemological procedure, for it also has ontological force (10). That is, understanding is not simply noetic, but is more deeply a matter of being. When we grasp meaning, there is a sense in which we are also grasped by the meaning we construct. Otherwise, the process of understanding is not yet complete.

In language, the event of understanding occurs when our preunderstanding, in dialectical relation with the object, becomes modified through the operation of the hermeneutical circle. This process occurs at two levels (88). As well as operating in the medium of discourse (language), the hermeneutical circle also operates in our grasp of the material of discourse (subject matter): "the whole receives its definition from the parts, and, reciprocally, the parts can only be understood in reference to a whole" (118).

3. Meaning and Truth

The act of understanding, then, involves the grasp of meaning (118). Meaning is something which is made - that is, constructed through language. It is a human imprint on the object being interpreted (7). In other words, meaning is not a predicate which can be located in the object itself, but rather arises from the interaction of subject and object. It is a matter of context: "Only within a specific context is an event meaningful" (24). There is no independent meaning separable from the event of understanding it (96). Meaning is "part of a hermeneutical circle always historically defined" (118). Palmer adds (119):

Meaning is historical...it is a matter of relationship, always related to a perspective from which events are seen. Meaning is not fixed and firm.

It changes with time. And yet (120):

Meaning is not subjective; it is not a projection of thought or thinking onto the object; it is a perception of a real relationship.

With regard to the empirical research of this thesis, the interpretation of congregational culture at Riverstone Church arises from the process of interchange in the relationship between researcher and congregants in the historically situated context.

Gary Comstock (1986) highlights the issue of the relationship between meaning and truth. One possible position with regard to this is reflected in the view of Hans Frei "that Christians must stop short of making claims about the truth of biblical stories" (Comstock, 118). That is, meaning takes the place of truth. In contrast, Paul Ricoeur does allow for claims to truth, but meaning and truth are bound up with each other. According to Kevin Vanhoozer, one of the strengths of Ricoeur's semantic approach to the study of human consciousness (as mediated by language, in symbols, myths, metaphors and texts) is that

"questions of truth are not separated from questions of meaning" (1990: 29). The question of truth, the related question of whether it is possible to speak of 'right' and 'wrong' interpretations, and the matter of testing claims to validity, are aspects of the role of method in hermeneutics, and this will be returned to below (pages 31-34).

B. Object Domains in Hermeneutics

To return to the question 'What is hermeneutics?', it was noted above that its characteristics vary according to the discipline in which it arises. This is because disciplines as separate, for example, as literary criticism and the social sciences are associated with separate object domains. Different contexts of hermeneutical enquiry are concerned with different objects of interpretation, and consequently pose different sets of questions.

1. Varieties of Interpretative Context

Richard Palmer distinguishes between various traditions in the development of modern hermeneutics. He identifies six distinct classifications (1969: 33ff):

1. The theory of biblical exegesis;
2. General philological methodology;
3. The science of all linguistic understanding;
4. The methodological foundation of the Geisteswissenschaften (social sciences);
5. The phenomenology of existence (Dasein) and of existential understanding;
6. The systems of interpretation, both recollective and iconoclastic, for recovering the meaning behind myths and symbols.

The list is in roughly chronological order of historical development. Again, all of these traditions are concerned with the process of interpretation, but they have differing emphases and object domains. Palmer (66) notes that they fall into two main categories comprising separate types of

questions. The first three classifications are oriented towards method and validity in interpretation, and the last three (which relate directly to the hermeneutical perspective of this research) are oriented towards the historically conditioned nature of understanding (which precludes claims to objective validity). The central figures whom Palmer associates with the last three traditions are, respectively: Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911); Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (born 1900); and Paul Ricoeur (born 1913).

The hermeneutical perspective of this research has its roots in the tradition of Wilhelm Dilthey, who built upon the philosophical foundation laid by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). The perspective of Dilthey's approach was that "concrete, historical, lived experience must be the starting and ending point" (Palmer, 99). Because of its direct relevance to social research, Dilthey's hermeneutical perspective is central to this project which is concerned with the interpretation of the concrete, historical, lived experience of a congregation. 'Historical' is not in the sense of being in the past, but rather at the cusp of past and future, because lived experience cannot be isolated from its temporal context - the past which led up to it, and the future towards which it is oriented. Palmer comments (111):

We understand the present really only in the horizon of past and future; this is not a matter of conscious effort but is built into the structure of experience itself.

On this theme, referring to Augustine's Confessions (Book XI: xx), Paul Ricoeur writes (1984: 60):

By saying that there is not a future time, a past time, and a present time, but a threefold present, a present of future things, a present of past things, and a present of present things, Augustine set us on the path of an investigation into the most primitive temporal structure of action. It is easy to rewrite each of the three temporal structures of action in terms of this threefold present. The present of the future? Henceforth, that is, from now on, I commit myself to doing that tomorrow. The present of the past? Now I intend to do that because I just realized that.... The

present of the present? Now I am doing it, because now I can do it...What counts here is the way in which everyday praxis orders the present of the future, the present of the past, and the present of the present in terms of one another.

To borrow the title which the impressionist artist Paul Gauguin gave to a painting in which he symbolises the human predicament of temporal life, this recognition of historicity in the context of interpreting congregational culture might suggest hermeneutical questions along the following lines: 'Whence come we? What are we? Whither go we?'

The above emphasis on both the concreteness and the historicity of lived experience, then, is directly relevant here for the empirical component which follows Part One of this thesis. Beginning in Part Two, the shared experience of the congregation at Riverstone Church becomes the interpretative context for this research. Then in Part Three (where theological reflection is brought to bear upon the ethnographic account), an understanding of the present and an awareness of the past meet with a consideration of the future in terms of transformation. The hermeneutic of this research is to consider what the congregation has been, to help interpret what the congregation is, with a view to the possibilities for what the congregation shall be. Particularly in the final chapter, the horizons which are "built into the structure of experience" are explicitly reflected upon in terms of what the implications might be in the pastoral context. The need to keep the three time horizons together is a theme which will be returned to below (page 36).

2. Validity and Hermeneutical Method

Dilthey's emphasis upon the historicity of understanding, arising from the temporality of all lived experience, and also his emphasis upon the acts of consciousness which are

involved in understanding, were to be taken up in the phenomenological theories of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger, influencing in turn the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur.

Palmer gives an account of Emilio Betti's criticisms of Hans-Georg Gadamer, in particular, Gadamer's move away from the idea of objectively valid interpretations and his lack of "normative methods for distinguishing a right from a wrong interpretation" (58). Gadamer's reply is that he does not propose a method, but is trying to describe in phenomenological terms what takes place in the act of interpretation (Gadamer, 1991: xxxi). By contrast, in the interests of objective knowledge Paul Ricoeur holds on to "the disciplines which seek to practise interpretation in a methodical manner" (1974: 11), and he resists

the temptation to separate truth, characteristic of understanding, from the method put into operation by disciplines which have sprung from exegesis.

However, since one of the consequences of historicity is that it governs all understanding, Gadamer questions the use of objectifying methods which are themselves subject to historical consciousness. These too are shaped by language and tradition. His concept of 'effective history' (described in more detail on pages 48-50 below) refers to the effect of the cultural past upon present historical consciousness (Gadamer, 300):

It determines in advance both what seems to us worth inquiring about and what will appear as an object of investigation, and we more or less forget half of what is really there - in fact, we miss the whole truth of the phenomenon - when we take its immediate appearance as the whole truth.

On the other hand, in favour of method, Ricoeur takes the view that historicity makes critical distance all the more necessary because of the need to justify our interpretations and to guard them from ideological distortion (Vanhoozer, 1990: 36 n.42). Indeed, Ricoeur suggests that a more appropriate title for Gadamer's book, Truth and Method,

would be Truth or Method, as the two are disjoined rather than conjoined (Ricoeur, 1981: 60).

Although the views of Gadamer and Ricoeur are in tension on this point, it does not follow that they represent a choice between extreme relativism or objectivism. Richard Bernstein (1983) offers an alternative position which takes account of both Gadamer and Ricoeur. To speak of truth is to speak of validity claims, and method is involved in defending them critically. Bernstein (1983) comments that the validation of claims to truth is a matter of

offering the best reasons and arguments that can be given in support of them...We never escape from the obligation of seeking to validate claims to truth through argumentation and opening ourselves to the criticism of others.

So, for example, it does not become necessary to accord equal status to conflicting interpretations. Bernstein draws the analogy with interpretations of a musical score (124-125). There can indeed be inferior interpretations which may be rejected on rational grounds. This is because all interpretations require validation. Such a pragmatism means that while absolute certainty is not assured, there is still an obligation to advance "the best possible arguments that are appropriate to our hermeneutical situation" in order to justify an interpretation (153).

The significance of the above for this project is that in social research it is indeed feasible to take hermeneutical account of historicity if, rather than adopting a laboratory ideal of objective validity, the aim is instead to gain entree to the intersubjective social context being observed. Anthony Thiselton (1992: 608-609) refers to the approach of Alfred Schutz, who was "concerned about the status of 'objective' understanding of the subjectivities of persons and of social actions and agencies", and who made "the pre-reflexive life-world" of the interpreter the beginning point of the process. By embracing and working

within the very historicity which other hermeneutical approaches would be concerned to work around, a social research focus upon the perspectives of the people in the situation will seek to explore rather than ignore historical consciousness, including that of the researcher who is not a detached observer but an involved participant whose own perspectives are active in the interpretative process. This point will be returned to below on pages 51-52.

Given that the categories of meaning and truth, or understanding and explanation, while being distinct, are not dichotomised, in the context of this research the process of interpreting congregational culture involves drawing upon 'explanatory' resources of relevant disciplines. In the context of Riverstone Church, concepts from social anthropology (for example, in the idea of symbolic boundaries), sociology (in the relationship between social status in an organisation and the architecture of the building it occupies), psychology (regarding dysfunctional narcissism), and indeed theology (in relation to mission and to the pastoral context), will be brought to the ethnographic account. There is a place for drawing upon different areas of specialisation wherever they might offer relevant insights, and yet without forgetting precritically that these too are perspectives which arise out of their own respective traditions. Emmanuel Lartey describes this bringing together of perspectives from different disciplines as "collective seeing" or "comparing visions" in the context of "situational analysis" (1996: 24):

It involves social and psychological analysis but also includes other perspectives on the situation encountered. It is multi-perspectival rather than inter-disciplinary, in that it realizes that it cannot completely encompass the complexities of the various necessary disciplines. What it can and must do is to bring selected perspectives from relevant disciplines to bear on the situation, in the hope of gaining a clearer understanding of what is going on...It also recognises that human persons are at best limited in their perceptions but that this should not deter them from the attempt to 'see clearly'.

In a similar vein, Thomas Groome comments (1987: 72):

This does not mean that the theologian must be personally trained in all of those disciplines (impossible) but he/she must have access to their scholarly findings.

A critical appropriation of such perspectives would involve, in David Tracy's terms (discussed on pages 56-57 below), the decision as to whether they stand in a relationship of identity, of analogy, or of non-identity with our own perspective. Questions of validity in the approach taken here will be discussed further in Chapter Two (on pages 68 and 94-95 below), where the research method of ethnography is presented as an appropriate hermeneutical approach to interpreting congregational culture at Riverstane Church.

3. Widening the Horizons

If Schleiermacher's project regarding the science of all linguistic understanding (the third classification of hermeneutics identified by Palmer) was to posit general principles of interpretation theory which could then subsume theological hermeneutics, then Dilthey's project alternatively was to widen the scope of hermeneutics in order to make it a critical foundation for the humanities. For Dilthey, hermeneutics had to be concerned with the process of understanding a range of expressions of human life, such as is objectified in action and in works of art, rather than confining it to life-expressions in the form of written texts. In other words, for the first time the object domain of hermeneutics was conceived to extend beyond literature to other phenomena which are also human expressions of life. His view was that the humanities, "focused on an objectification in life, are intrinsically hermeneutical" (Palmer, 112).

Dilthey distinguished between three categories of such objectifications or life-expressions: ideas, actions, and lived experience (Dilthey, 1990: 153). These three classes

of non-verbal phenomena, he argued, are legitimate objects of interpretation. The third category, lived experience, is objectified (for example) in a work of art - "fixed, visible and permanent; this makes its methodical and certain understanding possible" (Dilthey, 154). Palmer comments (114):

Thus, for Dilthey, hermeneutics takes on a new and larger significance: it becomes the theory not merely of text interpretation but of how life discloses and expresses itself in works.

Paul Ricoeur (1991), too, regards human action as a proper hermeneutical object, and identifies key respects in which human action can be treated analogously to a text. An action, like a text, has communicative impact through its content and the intention behind it. This is "the fixation of action" (150-152). Also, as with a text, an action has unintended consequences. This is "the autonomization of action" (153-154). Further, it opens up possible realms of meaning beyond its immediate context. This is the opposition of "relevance and importance" (154-155). Finally, like texts, meaningful action is open to re-interpretation. This is "human action as an 'open work'" (155). Consequently, as an objectification of human life, it is possible to understand meaningful action as a text. So although action is non-verbal in form, its interpretation can be hermeneutically related to the process of interpreting verbal forms of life-expression.

With regard to 'lived experience' as one of Dilthey's classes of non-textual hermeneutical objects, he identified works of art as one possible form of objectification. The question then arises as to what other forms of lived experience can be objectified in such a way that allows it to be studied methodically. Stephen Crites identifies narrativity as a key criterion in this respect: "the formal quality of experience through time is inherently narrative" (1971: 291). In similar vein to Ricoeur (on page 29 above) he refers to "the tensed unity" of the "three distinct

modalities in every moment of experience" of past, present, and future (301). Vanhoozer comments that all narrative, whether historical or fictional, "responds to the paradoxes of our experience with time by constructing order out of temporal chaos" (1990: 91). He notes that, for Ricoeur, (90):

narrative is bound up with the question of human identity (we are what we do) and with the very meaning of human existence (as beings-in-time).

It is possible, then, to objectify life experience in the form of narrative, that is, as a text. This way, it becomes a hermeneutical object which (in Dilthey's terms) is "fixed, visible and permanent."

Dilthey, then, is associated with extending the object domain of hermeneutics beyond (in the words of Lewis Mudge) "the world of texts and textlike products to the human life-world as such" (1987: 104). On this theme, John Thompson refers to "the unique and ineradicable meaningfulness of human phenomena" (1981: 1). Dilthey's extension of hermeneutics beyond the world of texts was later to be taken up by Heidegger and Gadamer, after Edmund Husserl, in the form of hermeneutical phenomenology. It was noted above that the categories of life-expression identified by Dilthey included not only lived experience and actions, but also 'ideas'. Accordingly, just as Dilthey's project corresponded to the fourth category in Palmer's sixfold classification of hermeneutical traditions (on page 28 above), that is, the methodological foundation of the social sciences, so also the hermeneutics of 'ideas' or objects of consciousness are taken up in the projects of Heidegger and Gadamer, which are associated with the fifth category in Palmer's typology, relating to "the phenomenology of existence (Dasein) and of existential understanding".

In the context of this research, the object domain is the intersubjective phenomenology of congregants at Riverstane Church. As will be seen in the next chapter, the sixth

category identified by Palmer ("systems of interpretation for recovering...the meaning behind myths and symbols") also has relevance for this project insofar as it relates to the symbol system of the congregation at Riverstane Church.

II. Practical Theological Perspectives

The first part of the chapter was concerned with locating this research in hermeneutical terms. The second part now considers the use of hermeneutics in Practical Theology, with particular reference to the interpretation of situations as one form of this.

In theology the object domain of hermeneutics sometimes relates to text and verbal phenomena, and sometimes to non-verbal phenomena. The first of these covers exegetical and philological questions and, since language is the medium of text and thought, linguistic questions are also included. This category, which corresponds to the first three of Palmer's classifications, might be called theological hermeneutics. With regard to non-verbal phenomena, hermeneutical questions might relate to matters of praxis, present or historical experience, and the public domain of symbolic meanings. This, on the other hand, might be called hermeneutical theology, and corresponds to the last three of Palmer's classifications. The difference between the two sets of questions is that the first relates to theological dimensions of hermeneutics (theology as the interpretative context), and the second to hermeneutical dimensions of theology (interpretation theory as intrinsic to the structure of theological reflection). Another way of putting this is that the first is a matter of content and the second is one of form.

Werner Jeanrond (1991: 8-9) also distinguishes between these two categories, but defines them in slightly different ways.

His view of theological hermeneutics involves the claim that all texts have a theological dimension, while his view of hermeneutical theology involves the claim that theology is by nature a hermeneutical exercise, in the sense that the Christian tradition is largely mediated by written texts. The nuances of Jeanrond's distinction are different from the one offered here, although the two are not opposed to each other. Jeanrond does allow for hermeneutics to cover more general areas of human communication, verbal or non-verbal (8), including works of art, but he confirms that "the now almost universal meaning of 'hermeneutics' [is] the theory of text-interpretation" (12). By implication, however, Jeanrond's use of the word 'almost' acknowledges that the theory of text-interpretation does not embrace the totality of hermeneutics. This distinction between theological hermeneutics and hermeneutical theology will be helpful for the discussion below.

A. Hermeneutics in Pastoral Theology

To recall Palmer's description of the different modes of hermeneutics (on page 25 above), 'expression' is highlighted as one of the three forms of interpretation (along with 'explanation' and 'translation'). In a theological setting, expression might relate for example to the public reading of scripture. There is however a sense in which lived expression might be regarded as a form of hermeneutics. Lesslie Newbigin states that "the only hermeneutic of the gospel is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it" (1989: 227). Similarly, Wayne Meeks writes of "a hermeneutics of social embodiment" (1986: 183-184):

A hermeneutical strategy entails a social strategy...Perhaps it is not too much to say that the hermeneutical circle is not completed until the text finds a fitting social embodiment...an empathy with the kind of communal life which "fits" the text is necessary for full understanding.

Again, Lewis Mudge describes such a mode of expression as an

"ecclesial hermeneutic" (1987: 104). He explains (117):

The church may offer the world a language for grasping its own present truths and future possibilities. The fact that the church is present as a lived parable or sign may possibly give rise to forms of thought that the world desperately needs...the church should thinkingly constitute its presence in the world so as to add something to humankind's capacity to envision itself whole.

The relevance of lived expression to interpretation theory is an important theme in this thesis, although not in the sense contained in the above extracts. The emphasis here is instead upon life-expression as a hermeneutical object rather than as a mode of interpretation, which is not explored further in this context.

Hermeneutical Practical Theology, in the sense intended here (interpretation theory as intrinsic to the structure of practical theological reflection), can be conceived in a variety of ways. This second part of the chapter will describe some of the directions in which practical theologians have explicitly taken up hermeneutical approaches. The material which follows is intended to illustrate some of these areas with a brief description of selected examples, rather than being a comprehensive or even representative account. In particular, for convenience the areas referred to are drawn from Pastoral Theology. There is only passing reference to hermeneutically conceived political theology so that, for example, the hermeneutical dimensions of liberation, feminist, and praxis theologies in general are omitted. Finally, examples of the interpretation of situations, which relate to the focus of this research upon congregational studies, are kept for the final section of the chapter.

1. Clinical Pastoral Education, Pastoral Counselling, and Pastoral Care

The origination of clinical pastoral education is associated with Anton Boisen's call for the study of living human documents. Charles Gerkin comments on this (1984: 38):

Anton Boisen's image of the human person as a "document" to be read and interpreted in a manner analogous to the interpretation of a historical text... meant that the depth experience of persons in the struggles of their mental and spiritual life demanded the same respect as do the historic texts from which the foundations of our Judeo-Christian faith tradition are drawn. Each individual living human document has an integrity of his or her own that calls for understanding and interpretation.

The idea of lived experience as a text has strong hermeneutical roots in the perspective of Dilthey, as noted earlier (on page 36 above). One of the ways in which the process of interpretation is made explicit in Practical Theology is in the action-reflection model of clinical pastoral education. John Foskett and David Lyall map out the cyclical nature of this approach to analysing personal experience (1988: 14ff). Under the supervision of an accredited specialist, and through ministry placements within a medical setting over set periods, the trainee has to reflect upon the interpretative context, which in this case is that of pastoral encounters with hospital patients. The hermeneutical circle moves from practice to the distancing moment of reflection and then back to reinterpreted practice.

But although the process is ordered, its hermeneutical limitations arise from the non-systematic nature of its interpretation. Don Browning identifies the problem of privileging the personal experience of either the patient or the trainee over the other (1991: 60):

Frequently the student's interior perceptions and psychological history at the center of inquiry, and analysis of the total situation becomes peripheral.

Donald Capps (1984: 12), refers in addition to the problem

in clinical pastoral reflection of defining what constitutes a pastoral action, of the need for a hermeneutically systematic definition of what it means to reflect on pastoral actions, and of the question regarding what constitutes the completion of such reflection.

Inspired by Boisen's insight, Gerkin further elaborates on the image of the living human document by construing the role of the pastoral counsellor in a hermeneutical mode as that of interpreting and guiding "the reconstruction of a structure and language of meaning on the part of the troubled person" (1984: 53). To do this, he finds important resources in the work of Gadamer and Ricoeur. Gadamer's view of the interplay between subject and object in the act of understanding, and Ricoeur's account of the symbolic level of language (such as in metaphor and narrative) both provide Gerkin with a hermeneutical basis for his approach to the therapeutic transformation of the storied self (47-51). He also finds in object relations theory a psychological basis for taking the storied self of both the troubled person and of the counsellor together so as to bring to bear upon them both the dynamic themes of the Christian story.

Similar ground is covered, but without the resources of interpretation theory adduced by Gerkin, in Joachim Scharfenberg's account of the therapeutic nature of pastoral dialogue. His position is that healing is a linguistic event (1987: 24), and that "the place where the hermeneutical circle of language becomes concrete is in relations with fellow human beings" (16). As will be discussed in the next section of this chapter, the idea of 'conversation' is extremely important for hermeneutical Practical Theology, and refers not simply to dialogue between human beings but more fundamentally to the interchange which takes place between subject and object in the act of understanding.

In a later book, Gerkin takes his narrative hermeneutic into the wider social context of pastoral care in a fragmented society, highlighting the function of Christian narrative in responding pastorally to the situation of competing narratives in modern life (1986: 19). Donald Capps is another practical theologian for whom hermeneutical theory has functioned to shape his approach to pastoral care. Unlike Gerkin, he makes use of Ricoeur's idea of meaningful human action as a text, and in so doing takes the discussion of hermeneutical Practical Theology beyond pastoral counselling to a consideration of meaningful action in pastoral care as a whole. He sees this as a refurbishment of the action-reflection model, making it less specialised while more hermeneutically systematic. Its seven elements are (1984: 42-60): that there is more to the meaning of a pastoral action than just the intention behind it; that there is no privileged interpreter of the pastoral action; that there is a world-disclosive level of meaning in a pastoral action above the immediacies of the situation, depending on the form of action and its metaphorical content (this is similar to the idea of 'lived expression' as interpretation, described on page 38 above); that "pastoral action is completed only when it has been understood (not initiated), and that such understanding entails personal appropriation" (47); that any pastoral action has a basic dynamic quality which needs to be diagnostically assessed and its world-disclosiveness considered; that a correctable but objectifying conceptual schema is needed to inform critically our understanding of pastoral action; and that the question of false consciousness in pastoral action depends on the congruence between pastoral intentionality, appropriation of the action, pastoral self-understanding, and relevance of the action's world-disclosiveness to the individuals concerned.

2. Christian Religious Education

Another area in which hermeneutical theory has shaped both the content and the form of practical theological reflection is in Thomas Groome's approach to Christian Religious Education. He rejects the notion of instrumental reason associated with the Enlightenment in which knowledge is regarded as something which leads to doing rather than arising from it (1980: 145). This objectivist "spectator theory of knowledge" (John Dewey's phrase) is in contrast to an active, reflective, relational, experiential way of knowing. As described above, these four elements can also be found in approaches to clinical pastoral education. Similarly too, the hermeneutical circle moves from practice to the distancing moment of reflection and then back to reinterpreted practice. But the difference here, again, is that Groome's approach (in the interpretative context of Christian education) is more systematically hermeneutical. He calls it a "shared praxis" approach in which (149):

by critical reflection on lived experience people discover and name their own story and vision, and...the Story and Vision of the Christian community.

More fully, he identifies five movements in the process of interpretation (1991: 146-148): naming/expressing present praxis; critical reflection on present action; making Christian story and vision accessible; dialectical hermeneutic so as to appropriate Christian story/vision to participants' stories and vision; and decision/response for lived Christian faith. In particular, the emphasis on a dialectical hermeneutic between present praxis and the Christian story and vision depends upon Gadamer's model of the interplay between subject and object in the act of understanding (Groome, 1991: 251). Further, the completion of the hermeneutical circle by moving from practice to theory to practice corresponds to Gadamer's concern with application (Groome, 1991: 224). In the words of Gadamer (Gadamer, 1991: 324, 384):

Application is neither a subsequent nor merely an

occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but codetermines it as a whole from the beginning...The experience of meaning that takes place in understanding always includes application.

3. Homiletics

At first sight the role of hermeneutics in relation to homiletics might seem to be fairly basic. If preaching begins with exegesis of a verse or a passage from the Bible, then hermeneutics as interpretation of the written text is an obvious part of the homiletical process. However, there is a deeper, more complex sense in which the exegesis represents only one moment of the hermeneutical circle. Gerhard Ebeling writes (1963: 329):

For if its aim is, that what it has proclaimed should be further proclaimed, then the hermeneutic task prescribed by the text in question is not only not left behind when we turn to the sermon, but is precisely then for the first time brought to its fullest explication. The problem of theological hermeneutics would not be grasped without the inclusion of the task of proclamation; it is not until then that it is brought decisively to a head at all.

In keeping with the comment of Wayne Meeks regarding social embodiment (on page 38 above), it might be added that even with proclamation the hermeneutical circle is not yet completed until it is appropriated by the community in its praxis, an insight associated with Latin American hermeneutics and exemplified in Paulo Freire's concept of conscientization as education into, and action taken against, social, political and economic injustice (1972: 60ff). The completion of the hermeneutical circle through appropriation of the text is also a theme taken up by Walter Wink (1973).

As was repeated on page 38 above with reference to Palmer, expression is a form of hermeneutics, and this would suggest that interpretation theory has implications for preaching, not simply in the matter of content, but also with regard to form. In this case, preaching as part of the wider

hermeneutical circle described above by Ebeling does not reduce to the task of reporting the results of exegesis, but is a more fully hermeneutical task. For example, the idea of the preaching event as a special kind of word-event is reflected in the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), which states that "The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God" (paragraph 4). However, in the terms set out on page 37 above this relates more to theological hermeneutics (content) than to hermeneutical theology (form).

Alternatively, homiletics can be informed for example by the hermeneutics of literary theory, particularly with regard to the nature of different genres and their construction. A sermon which is cast in a narrative mode, for example, could be guided by the way narrative operates, as is set out in John Dominic Crossan's typology of the use of language in narrative (1988: 42) - myth, apologue, action, satire, and parable - and in Wesley Kort's account of the elements of narrative (1975: 18) - setting (or atmosphere), plot, character, and tone.

That is, in hermeneutically conceived homiletics the narrativity of a sermon does not depend on narrative content, but rather on the narrativity of its form. The difference is between 'the use of story' as distinct from 'narrative structure'. Accordingly, Eugene Lowry maps out the movement of plot within narrative preaching, an event-in-time which moves from an opening disequilibrium, to the escalation of conflict, to surprising reversal, and to closing denouement in the disclosure of the gospel (1980: 25). In a later book (1989) he continues the discussion with regard to parabolic narrative as a particular form in narrative preaching. Again, the difference is between sermons on the parables as distinct from parable sermons.

Extending this to a wider range of genres, Thomas Long takes up the various literary forms of the Bible in his hermeneutical approach to homiletics. The motto which

prefaces his book is the following quotation from Frank Kermode: "There are constraints which shadow interpretation; and the first is genre" (Long, 1989: 7). He explains the significance of this for homiletics (13):

The idea that the literary form of a biblical text is hermeneutically important and should exert influence in the production of a sermon seems simple enough. Closer scrutiny reveals, however, that this is actually a rather complex insight bristling with unanswered questions...Precisely what relationship does literary form have to what is typically called "meaning" in biblical texts? When and how, in the process of moving from text to sermon, should the literary dynamics of a text be taken into account?...What linkage should there be between the form of a text and the structure of a sermon based upon that text?

The literary forms which he discusses are psalms, proverbs, narratives, parables, and epistles. He identifies four exegetical questions and one homiletical question that should be raised when interrogating a text (24). These relate to: identifying the genre; explicating the rhetorical function of the genre; examining the literary devices employed by the genre to achieve its rhetorical effect; investigating how the particular text in question embodies these characteristics and dynamics; and enquiring how the sermon in its particular setting can say and do what the text says and does in its setting. The objective is not to replicate the text "but to regenerate the impact of some portion of that text" (127) by matching the movement, oppositions, central insight, and mood of the sermon to that of the text.

To conclude this section of the chapter, one last example of hermeneutically conceived homiletics can be found in the inductive preaching which is associated with Fred Craddock (1971). It shares with Thomas Groome's approach to Christian religious education the insight contained in John Dewey's educational philosophy of helping people actively to reach conclusions rather than positing conclusions for them (Craddock, 58):

Experience figures prominently in the process, not just at the point of receiving lessons and truths to be implemented, but in the process of arriving at those truths. Because the particulars of life provide the place of beginning, there is the necessity of a ground of shared experience.

This rejects the 'spectator' theory of knowledge or the 'banking' concept of education (Freire, 1972: 45ff), and means that instead of taking the exegetical conclusions reached in advance by the preacher and then applying them to the hearers (moving from the general to particulars), the sermon in effect invites the hearers to move through the process of thought which leads to exegetical conclusions (moving from particulars to the general). The first approach corresponds to deduction, and the second is induction (54). In terms of interpretation theory, such a homiletical process regenerates the hermeneutical circle which engaged the text prior to and during sermon construction.

So far in the second part of this chapter, some areas have been identified where Practical Theology has been oriented in terms of interpretation theory, in which not only the content but also the form of practical theological reflection is conceived hermeneutically. The next section now turns to that region of hermeneutical Practical Theology which is germane to the focus of this thesis.

B. The Interpretation of Situations

As was indicated at the beginning of the chapter, in this thesis the type of situation in question is that of congregational culture at Riverstane Church. While the content of what is meant by this will be discussed in the next two chapters, the present chapter seeks now to clarify the sense in which the word 'situation' is used here, with reference to the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer.

1. Effective History

Anthony Thiselton is critical of any practical theological conception of a situation which over-privileges the present by overlooking its essential historicity (1992: 557): "some pastoral theologians tend to ignore historical factors that relativize present criteria of relevance." He refers to this as an absolutising of the present and challenges "the bare 'description' of the present situation in abstraction from its past and future context of theological founding and theological promise", likening it to "the positivist myth" that social and pastoral analysis "is not yet interpretation" (605). He adds (611):

Any emphasis on "the present situation" must very clearly seek an understanding of the present which allows it to be perceived within the broadest possible horizons from the very outset of the hermeneutical process of identifying what counts as "present experience" of a relevant nature.

As was noted on page 29 above, the hermeneutical perspective of this project takes seriously Thiselton's call for the interpretation of situations to embrace the threefold nature of the present, which is to say (as Thomas Groome puts it) that "within the present reside the heritage of the past and the possibility of the future" (1980: 8). In the life of a community such as a congregation, the hermeneutical process of identifying what counts as relevant present experience will depend on gaining access to the perceptions of persons in that community as to what they consider to be relevant. This means entering into their intersubjective context to discover what aspects of their present past, present future, and present present are to them most salient, and precludes an Archimedean point of reference which would indeed presuppose the idea that description is not yet interpretation. That is, as Paul Murray summarises this position, "there are no 'views from nowhere', only partial and particular views from somewhere" (1996: 1).

But it is not only the situation in question which is subject to historicity; it also governs the understanding of the interpreter. Gadamer refers to this as the principle of history of effect, or effective history. This is the "efficacy of history within understanding itself" (1991: 300), the effect of the past to shape our preunderstandings (which Gadamer calls 'prejudices'), so that "historical consciousness is itself situated in the web of historical effects" (300). He adds (301):

In all understanding, whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work... historically effected consciousness is an element in the act of understanding itself and...is already effectual in finding the right questions to ask. Consciousness of being affected by history is primarily consciousness of the hermeneutical situation.

Again, in the context of the empirical component of this research, just as the determination of what counts as relevant present experience will be guided by the perceptions of congregants, so also the questions being asked of the situation will be guided by those of the congregants themselves.

While "to be historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete" (302), the implication of effective history for this research is that not only is it necessary to recognise ways in which the congregation's past has an impact upon the present, but also to reflect upon the impact of the researcher's own effective history in interpreting the situation. Gadamer continues (301-302):

To acquire an awareness of a situation is, however, always a task of peculiar difficulty. The very idea of a situation means that we are not standing outside it and hence are unable to have any objective knowledge of it. We always find ourselves within a situation, and throwing light on it is a task that is never entirely finished...yet the fact that it cannot be completed is due not to a deficiency in reflection but to the essence of the historical being that we are.

In keeping with the above, the empirical component of this research does not aspire towards some ideal of detached objectivity with regard to interpreting the situation of the

congregation at Riverstane Church. The justification for choosing an ethnographic approach lies in the definition of 'situation' here (congregational culture), and in the need to select a research method that is appropriate to the nature of the research question, which in this case concerns the ways church members experience congregational culture. These matters will be addressed in the next two chapters.

Given such an approach, it also follows from the above that the light which is thrown on the situation can never be complete. This means there has to be an arbitrary point in the process where it is brought to a close, in the full knowledge that while much more could be said than has been said, it is never possible to say all there is to say. A decision is therefore required as to when it is appropriate to bring the interpretative process to a close, depending on how adequate the interpretation is. Again, given that it is never complete but only finished, this judgement can only be based on the relative degree to which the interpretation accords with the parameters of the situation.

2. The Horizon of Understanding

What then is the nature of a situation? Gadamer refers to the 'horizons' of the historically 'effected' consciousness of the interpreter and of the effective history of the object of interpretation (302):

Every finite present has its limitations. We define the concept of "situation" by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence essential to the concept of situation is the concept of "horizon." The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth...On the other hand, "to have a horizon" means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it. A person who has an horizon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon.

Inherent in this idea is the condition that the horizon of the interpreter is not encompassed by the horizon of the hermeneutical object. Otherwise no interpretation is possible (305):

We must always already have a horizon in order to be able to transpose ourselves into a situation. For what do we mean by "transposing ourselves"? Certainly not just disregarding ourselves. This is necessary, of course, insofar as we must imagine the other situation. But into this other situation we must bring, precisely, ourselves. Only this is the full meaning of "transposing ourselves." If we put ourselves in someone else's shoes, for example, then we will understand him - ie, become aware of the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other person - by putting ourselves in his position.

The interpreter, although transposed into the situation, is always distinct from it, and the significance of this for interpreting the situation of the congregation, or any community, is that it becomes necessary for the researcher not to 'go native'. As was noted on page 33 above, the interpreter's perspective is part of the interpretative process. As Susan Hekman notes, the abandoning of one's own horizon is self-alienating, and it is only in terms of our own concepts that we can gain an understanding of the situation (1986: 104).

3. The Fusion of Horizons

Such horizons are not closed or fixed but move and change (304): "Horizons change for a person who is moving." According to Gadamer, understanding consists in the merging or 'fusion' of the respective horizons of the interpreter and the hermeneutical object (307): "To bring about this fusion in a regulated way is the task of what we called historically effected consciousness." But this fusion is not a matter of assimilation, so as to erase the tension between the two horizons (306):

The hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension by attempting a naive assimilation of the two but in consciously bringing it out.



He adds (374): "we regain the concepts of a historical past in such a way that they also include our comprehension of them." That is, again, the observer's perspective and concepts are a necessary part of the interpretation. Also (576):

the fusion of horizons...does not allow the interpreter to speak of an original meaning of the work without acknowledging that, in understanding it, the interpreter's own meaning enters in as well.

The implication of the above for this research is that there is no definitive interpretation against which all other interpretations must be compared. In particular, the members of the congregation do not exclusively determine some final interpretation of the situation, but rather form one horizon of understanding. The researcher's horizon is no less a part of the hermeneutical process, and also does not take precedence over that of the other. What counts is the fusion of these horizons, in which both participate to produce an interpretation. As a result there can be critique of a situation, although not one that arises from a position of detached objectivity, but from the horizon of the researcher on account of the active part which it plays in the interpretative process. Moreover, in the context of this research into congregational culture at Riverstone Church, it becomes possible to link the preunderstandings of the researcher to theological values as the grounds of such a critique. For this reason, the ethnography contained in Part Two of this thesis restricts itself to the construction of an interpretative account, while more critical reflection upon it is contained in Part Three.

This dialectical process of fusing horizons is described by Gadamer as a hermeneutical conversation (388), and this is a theme that will be returned to below in relation to the theological method of 'revised correlation' associated with David Tracy (on pages 56-57).

4. Hermeneutical Social Research

Susan Hekman discusses the relevance of Gadamer's dialectical hermeneutics in the context of social research (1986: 145):

The meanings of actions, like texts, are a product of fusing the horizons of the actor and the interpreter; both the social actor and the social scientist participate in establishing the meaning of an action.

That is, the agent in social behaviour does not have semantic autonomy. Hekman draws out the contrast between this and the position of Eric Hirsch, who argued that the meaning of a text is fixed by the meaning as intended by the author, a position reflected in 'interpretive' social science which insists "that the meaning of an action is determined by the meaning bestowed on it by the actor" (145). Although this position rejects the idea of distancing objectivity in favour of "the intersubjective meanings of the social context", it still does not allow equal place to the values of the interpreter. Hekman comments (146-148):

Gadamer, in contrast, emphasises both sides of the dialectic of interpretation. His position does not grant epistemological primacy to either side of the dialectic but sees both as equal contributors...Thus the understanding of the action is neither an appropriation of the actors' concepts nor the imposition of the interpreter's categories, but a fusing of the two into a distinct entity: the interpretation...In Gadamer's words, the action is always seen in terms of the horizon of the interpreter and, more particularly, the specific question posed in the interpretation.

The empirical component of this research is informed and guided by Gadamer's hermeneutical approach, particularly with regard to the choice of empirical research method. As will be described in the next chapter, the social anthropological method of ethnography is consistent with the hermeneutical perspective set out here and is appropriate to the nature of the interpretative object, which is congregational culture at Riverstane Church.

Given that Practical Theology can be hermeneutically conceived along the lines indicated above, the question then arises as to the theological content of the interpretation of situations, which will now be turned to below.

C. Theological Interpretation of Situations

This final section of the chapter will now turn to selected examples of the interpretation of situations in recent Practical Theology. Here, the term 'situation' is intended to refer to interpretative contexts beyond that of interpersonal pastoral care and counselling described earlier, as set out by Donald Capps and Charles Gerkin, to the more 'generalist' approaches of Edward Farley, David Tracy, and Don Browning. Although, as Thiselton says, "generalization too often either restricts work to either theory alone or becomes trivial because it articulates only what can be universally observed" (1992: 557), these generalists articulate in broad terms how theological interpretation can be brought to a situation.

1. Edward Farley

Regarding the theological interpretation of situations, Edward Farley makes the following comment (1987: 1):

In the traditional approach, theology is involved in interpretation but the object of interpretation is the past and the texts of the past. And while believers and church leaders do in fact interpret situations (culture, war, marriage, death, etc.), they do so directly out of the tradition without passing through an inquiry which would uncover what is occurring when we interpret a situation theologically. We do thematize interpretation as it is directed to texts, hence, we are at home in problems of historical method, exegesis, and textual hermeneutics. We have not thematized - become methodically self-conscious about - the interpretation of situations.

He defines a situation in terms of the responses demanded by it. A situation is (12):

the gathering together of powers and occurrences in the environment so as to evoke responses from the participants. A situation is something we have no choice but to respond to in some way.

Farley sets out four distinct tasks in the interpretation of situations (12-14). The first task is to identify and describe the distinctive and constituent features of a situation, distinguishing their different genres and how these interact. This is not an objective procedure, not a fly-on-the-wall snapshot, but an interpretation shaped by language and preunderstandings, and therefore requires an account of these subjectivities. The second step is a probing of the history, the aetiology of a situation, discerning the whole past, not just the filtered deposits of tradition, but also uncovering suppressed elements of the past. The third task is to consider the gestalt or systemic whole in which the situation is placed, the intersituational system which defines the general context. The final task is to discern what the situation demands in terms of a theologically informed response. For example, this might be in terms of a response to distorted power structures, idolatries, and the fallenness which is present in these. This lays emphasis upon practical involvement in the situation rather than detached intellectualising, and not simply making "tidy intellectual connections with theological concepts" (Lyall, 1989: 5). Farley comments (14):

A theological version of this task cannot avoid the insights of its own mythos into the corruption and redemption of human beings. Because of that corruption, human beings shape the demand of the situation according to their idolatries, their absolutized self-interests, their ethnocentrisms, their participations in structures of power. Faith then interprets situations and their demands as always containing this element of corruption and redemption... The discernment of this dimension of the demand-response is at the very heart of a theological hermeneutic of situations.

Details of the fourth task, theological response, are set out in more detail by Farley elsewhere (1983: 165-169). In this task, attention to the situation is followed by attention to Christian tradition, so that the situation is allowed to question the text and vice-versa. After this the normativeness of the tradition has to be determined, in the light of which a future situation can then be envisioned. (This is comparable to the five movements in Thomas Groome's approach to Christian religious education, as noted earlier on page 43 above.) Given that it is in the form of a proposal, however, Farley's four-stage process lacks detail with regard to what would be involved in a disciplined approach to attention to the situation.

2. David Tracy

This cross-questioning of text and situation indicated by Farley receives a more methodical treatment by David Tracy (1981), and it is Tracy's approach that Groome draws upon (Groome, 1991: 191). Tracy's approach is based on Gadamer's model of how understanding proceeds. According to Gadamer (1991: 385), "Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding," and "the situation of two people coming to an understanding in conversation has a genuine application to hermeneutics." As described on page 52 above, each person brings a horizon of understanding to such a conversation (the range of meanings and preunderstandings) and it is through the fusion of horizons that understanding proceeds. Gadamer concludes (388), "Thus it is perfectly legitimate to speak of a hermeneutical conversation" (his emphasis). Tracy comments on this to-and-fro interplay between subject and object (1987: 143):

The most persuasive aspect of hermeneutics on the model of conversation which Gadamer developed is, for me, its insistence that every genuine conversation...is involved with the search for truth and not merely with meaning.

In applying the conversational model to the conflict of

interpretations, Tracy suggests setting up a mutually critical dialogue to arbitrate between them, in which each interpretative voice in the hermeneutical conversation is open to critique. As a method in theology, the purpose of Tracy's approach is to correlate, in a fully critical way, Christian interpretation with other interpretations. There are three possible correlative positions (1987: 139): "a practical identity between the two interpretations", "the presence of analogies (as similarities in difference) between two interpretations", and "radical non-identities." This approach is described as a "mutually critical correlation of the interpreted theory and praxis of the Christian fact and the interpreted theory and praxis of the contemporary situation" (1983: 76).

Here, Tracy is making use of Paul Tillich's theological method of correlating Christian answers with existential questions, but with a major difference: Tillich did not envisage critique of Christian interpretations, whereas Tracy does. In that sense Tracy revises Tillich's correlational approach. Germane to this is Mark Kline Taylor's elaboration of the dynamics of hermeneutical conversation as suggested by Gadamer. As well as the interplay of question and answer, and the highlighting of particularities and differences, Taylor notes that it does not simply involve the eirenic trading of viewpoints (1990: 62): "real conversation that highlights difference entails clash and conflict." He proposes two further dynamics which are not explicit in Gadamer, namely the importance of a breadth of perspectives in hermeneutical conversation, and the grounds for acknowledging a hermeneutical privilege to certain disempowered perspectives (63-67).

3. Don Browning

Michael Williams (1986: 48-49) regards the various approaches of Farley, Groome, Tracy, and Browning with

regard to the theological interpretation of situations to be in correspondence with each other. However, while Tracy is more specific than Farley or Groome on the details of a critical conversation, Browning argues that he is not specific enough in establishing norms of action (1983: 51). Browning makes the same comment in relation to the interpretative process described by James and Evelyn Whitehead (1980: 2, 12-19). They identified three stages in parallel to those of Farley and Groome: attention or listening to the situation, assertion, and decision. It is the stage of assertion which Browning considers to require more detail, and his expansion of the three stages is: the experience of the problem, attention and listening, critical analysis and comparison, and decision and strategy. It is the stage of critical analysis and comparison, he argues, that needs a more explicit treatment, and the direction he takes in doing so follows the various levels of reasoning which can be employed in the performance of ethical analysis.

While his development of this will be described more fully in Chapter Three (on pages 123-127 below), it suffices here to note that Browning argues that all practice contains implicit theories and so is "theory-laden" (1991: 6). Part of the interpretation of situations, therefore, involves making these theories explicit. As these theories are themselves interpretations, they have to be critically correlated with Christian interpretations. The second stage in Browning's argument is that all such theories contain assumed positions which ultimately have theological dimensions (for example, concerning human nature, aspiration, or fulfilment). This point is similar to Werner Jeanrond's definition of theological hermeneutics as a discipline which "claims that all texts have a theological dimension, at least implicitly" (Jeanrond, 1991: 9). As a result, for Browning, theological interpretation of situations consists in explicating the theological

dimensions of those theories which are implicit in situations of practice. Following Tracy, this is then taken up in the critical correlation which establishes identities, analogies, and radical non-identities.

Conclusion

This chapter has had three aims. First, to clarify the usage of terms such as 'hermeneutics', 'interpretation', 'understanding', 'meaning', and 'truth' in the context of this research. The second was to give some account of how the object domain of hermeneutics can be extended to include life-expressions such as works of art, actions, and even situations. The third was to indicate some of the directions in which hermeneutics has been refracted in Practical Theology, including the theological interpretation of situations. Although none of the generalist approaches described in the final section above are being straightforwardly applied here, there is continuity with their basic emphases, in particular the starting point of experiencing the situation, followed by disciplined attention and listening to it, then critical reflection upon it in relation to Christian values, and finally strategic proposals arising from this.

In their epilogue, under the heading 'From Situation to Articulation: The Congregation as Culture', Lewis Mudge and James Poling point in the direction which is being taken in this thesis (1987: 159):

We are called to begin with a "humble" - that is, watchful and listening - hermeneutic which can expectantly approach the signs each community of faith generates in its setting. For this purpose, it is indispensable that members of the faith community think, speak for themselves, and receive a hearing. Their "inner" appropriation of the "objective" situation is important. It is important, too, that the element of suspicion does not enter before the hearing and seeing are complete. Perhaps the best model is that of the anthropologist who seeks to understand a

community's culturally coded messages through a process of participant observation before imposing analytical categories which originate in the anthropologist's own, academic culture.

Theological interpretation of congregations is the theme of Chapter Three. Before that, however, it is necessary to consider the appropriate empirical method for interpreting the nature of situation involved - namely, congregational culture at Riverstane Church - and this is discussed in the next chapter in relation to the social anthropological method of ethnography.

Ethnographic Method and the Interpretation of Culture

Introduction

In Chapter One an account was given of the hermeneutical basis for interpreting situations. The social situation being considered in this research is congregational culture at Riverstane Church, and this chapter now turns to the social anthropological method of ethnography as an appropriate empirical research procedure. With regard to the field of congregational studies, which will be considered in the next chapter, ethnographic approaches have indeed been previously adopted. However, these have tended to lack clarity on the idea of culture, the hermeneutical nature of ethnography, what the method involves, and what are its limitations. The result has been a corresponding lack of ethnographic detail as a basis for subsequent theological reflection.

The intention of this chapter is to bring clarity to these matters so as to anticipate what lies ahead in the ethnography contained in Part Two of the thesis. The basis for selecting ethnography as the empirical research method here is that among the social sciences the interpretation of culture is the specialisation of Social Anthropology. Anthony Cohen (1993: 195) comments that the word 'culture' is often misappropriated in relation to other contexts, and that its

abuse angers anthropologists, not because we are lexical purists, but because it threatens to steal our clothes. Culture is our business, the conceptual focus and organizing topic of our discipline.

It is therefore both reasonable and necessary that the approach adopted here to interpreting congregational culture at Riverstane Church should be guided by a social

anthropological perspective. As will be described in this chapter, it is an approach which is hermeneutically conceived in its attention to the intersubjective nature of understanding and to the role of language in constructing meaning. It also recognises the equal role in the hermeneutical conversation which is played by the researcher's own horizon.

In view of this, it will be apparent that the choice of research procedure in this thesis is not based on the goal of scientific method, making observations with a view to generalisation in the form of predictive theory. Nor is it concerned with the testing of existing theory which has been proposed elsewhere. Rather, it has an essentially comparative function, whereby the study of one particular community has in certain respects the potential to shed light on other such communities (in this case, congregations) where appropriate. For this reason it is possible in Part Three of this thesis to draw conclusions from the ethnographic account in Part Two which have more than a purely local relevance, without entailing the fallacy of argument from the particular to the general. Neither generating theory nor making theoretical generalisations, the approach here is instead, as Zygmunt Bauman has put it, that of "spotting the general in the particular" (1978: 218).

This is not to say that there is no place at all for scientific procedure within ethnographic research. Quantitative analysis, for example, is important in some types of ethnography, depending on research goals and particular ethnographic schools. Again, a scientific outlook is also present in those approaches which are concerned with the formulation of social theory through programmatic ethnographic studies. Other ethnographies, however, can be outwith larger projects and also entirely qualitative, as is the case in this thesis.

From this it can be seen that there are shades of variety within ethnography itself, each school with particular outlooks and emphases. This chapter does not attempt to give an overview of these or to give a definitive account of ethnography as a subject area. Rather it focuses on features of ethnography as they relate in general terms to the approach taken here, and considers some of the limitations of the method. Details of the research design in this thesis regarding congregational culture at Riverstane Church will be described in Chapter Four.

I. The Nature of Ethnography

Because of the variety among ethnographic schools, there is a definitional problem arising from their respective nuances and differences. For this reason it will be useful here to consider the general overviews of the subject area which can be found in encyclopaedia entries under the heading of ethnography.

To do this, reference will be made to two separate sources, each directed at different audiences and containing different levels of detail. One is a version intended for a general social science readership, and the other specialises in Social Anthropology itself. Consistent with this, the specialist version is by far the more substantial. The entry in The Social Science Encyclopedia (second edition 1996) is written by the social anthropologist John Van Maanen, and in the Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology (first edition 1996) the writer is social anthropologist Roger Sanjek. In what follows, selective extracts will be cited from these entries (abbreviated to SSE and ESCA) in order to outline some of the parameters which form the background to the ethnographic approach taken in this thesis.

A. Ethnography as Hermeneutical Description

The encyclopaedia entries are helpful not only in providing an introduction to ethnography but also in raising some of the issues surrounding the method. Accordingly, as well as referring to these entries, this section of the chapter will also interact with criticism of ethnographic research as voiced by other social anthropologists.

1. Representation

Both SSE and ESCA highlight the double meaning of the term 'ethnography': it refers both to the product of research (the documented account), and to the process or method of research (participant observation fieldwork). This part and the second part of the chapter are concerned with the process of ethnography, and discussion of the product is contained in the third part.

Clifford Geertz (1973: 5) states that the analysis of culture is "not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning." This calls attention to the hermeneutical quality of the process - ethnography as interpretation - and to the central issue of representation. If ethnography is hermeneutical description, then what is the status of that description? How objective can it be, and what is its worth when placed side by side with other forms of description?

Following from the discussion on hermeneutics in Chapter One, ethnography as a form of description cannot claim to be thoroughly objective. All description is interpretation because, filtered through human consciousness and language, there is no such thing as neutral or value-free description. That is, the horizon of the interpreter (the range of preunderstandings arising from historically effected consciousness) plays an active part in the making of

meaning. In this respect ethnography and historiography can be compared. Using language which is now somewhat dated Robin George Collingwood expresses the same idea as follows (1993: 108):

The historian (and for that matter the philosopher) is not God, looking at the world from above and outside. He is a man, and a man of his own time and place. He looks at the past from the point of view of the present: he looks at other countries and civilisations from the point of view of his own. This point of view is valid only for him and people situated like him, but for him it is valid. He must stand firm in it, because it is the only one accessible to him, and unless he has a point of view he can see nothing at all.

Collingwood's statement is similar to Gadamer's point that "We must always have a horizon in order to be able to transpose ourselves into a situation" (1991: 304). In fact Gadamer (370) cites Collingwood's use of the logic of question and answer as the correct approach to understanding an object of interpretation, since we understand the hermeneutical object (whether it be a text, a work of art, or an event) only if we understand (or reconstruct) the question to which it is an answer. This corresponds to Gadamer's idea of the fusion or interplay of horizons in the hermeneutical dialogue. However, it does not mean that the horizon or intention behind the question of the hermeneutical object determines how it is to be understood (374):

With Collingwood, we can say that we understand only when we understand the question to which something is the answer, but the intention of what is understood in this way does not remain foregrounded against our own intention. Rather, reconstructing the question to which the meaning of a text is understood as an answer merges with our own questioning.

In the interpretation of social situations, the logic of question and answer means that the situation can be regarded as being in 'answer' to a social 'question', or as a 'response' to a social 'challenge', and this situational answer engages and is engaged by the questions of the interpreter in a dialectical hermeneutic.

While thorough objectivity is not attainable in description, then, it is still possible for it to be in some sense true. The difference lies in the distinction between being the one true description and being a true description. Since ethnography as a systematic approach is designed to produce true description, it is not a question of whether there are values present in ethnographic description, but rather whose values they happen to be. This is an important point which will be returned to in the second part of the chapter (page 86).

Further, it does not follow from the absence of absolute objectivity that all descriptions are necessarily of equal status. This also is reflected in the parallel between ethnography and historiography. Both are concerned with describing the complexities of social reality, with documenting the various points of view which are present in the situation, and with making judgements about what is the case. The historian George Clark comments on historical description as being processed through human minds "and therefore cannot consist of elemental and impersonal atoms which nothing can alter" (1957: xxv). However, as the historian E H Carr notes (1987: 7), it is unnecessary to

take refuge in scepticism, or at least in the doctrine that, since all historical judgements involve persons and points of view, one is as good as another.

In other words, as was discussed in Chapter One with regard to the tension between Gadamer and Ricoeur on the relationship between truth and meaning (page 32 above), the options are not limited to an epistemological choice between objectivism and relativism. Richard Bernstein (1983: 153) argues against relativism, and instead proposes the hermeneutical pragmatism of advancing "the best possible arguments that are appropriate to our hermeneutical situation" in support of the validity claims of our interpretations. It is not necessary to define truth as being only that which the community of interpreters will allow.

In the field of Social Anthropology, Martyn Hammersley argues both as an ethnographer and as a critic of ethnography. Choosing a deliberately ambiguous title for his collection of critical essays, What's Wrong With Ethnography? (1992), he argues in favour of ethnographic representation conceived as 'subtle realism' as opposed to naive realism. Naive realism is hermeneutically flawed because it adopts an objectivist perspective and neglects the role of theoretical and methodological assumptions in actively contributing to the content of description and explanation (34). At the other extreme, the relativistic position which states that the ethnographer's account is simply one version of the world among others is also unhelpful because it involves a self-refuting circularity. This negative circularity lies in the impossibility of justifying such description without reference to other criteria which in turn are themselves culturally relative (50). Hammersley's statement of the inherent inconsistency of relativism is direct (61): "if true it applies to itself, thereby rendering its own truth relative, which means that there are conditions under which it is false".

As a workable alternative to this, suggests Hammersley (50), a subtle form of realism

can maintain belief in the existence of phenomena independent of our claims about them, and in their knowability, without assuming that we can have unmediated contact with them and therefore that we can know with certainty whether our knowledge of them is valid or invalid.

This carefully-worded statement is congruent to the pragmatism of Bernstein in that it allows both for structure in reality itself and yet also for the role of human construction upon it. It is a position which comes from rejecting the view "that knowledge must be defined as beliefs whose validity is known with certainty" (52).

Hammersley continues (60):

the fact that we have no direct access to reality, and thereby to knowledge that can provide a foundation of certainty for our understanding of the world, does not

necessarily imply rejection of truth as correspondence. Nor does it undermine the idea that some methods are more effective than others in producing knowledge of reality, or the idea that there are criteria by which we can justify empirical claims. These conclusions only follow if we assume that for claims to be called knowledge they must be known to be true with absolute certainty, that to be of any value methods must ensure true findings, and that criteria must produce assessments that are beyond all possible doubt.

However, as a consequence of this, the implication for ethnography is that while reality can indeed be represented, albeit selectively, it cannot be reproduced, and so it becomes incumbent upon ethnographers to make explicit and to justify the relevances upon which they base their accounts (54). Again, the ethnographer's value and factual judgements are bound up with the research, but so are those of the community being studied. Although the two are dialectically related in a hermeneutical conversation, with neither taking precedence over the other, it is nevertheless consistent with this for the horizon of the community initially to guide the conversation without it amounting to a hermeneutical priority. In the terms expressed by Collingwood and Gadamer, the answer expressed in the situation "puts a question to the interpreter" (Gadamer, 369).

2. Validity and Reliability

In view of the non-objective nature of all description, the question arises as to what there might be in the nature of ethnographic description to give it a status which is any different from other forms of description, such as travel writing, gazetteers, journalistic accounts, or (as Hammersley puts it) "armchair reflection" (16). Given the presupposition that people in a community construct their collective social world of meanings, and that ethnographers equally construct their interpretations in the field setting, this would seem to entail relativistic

consequences. In that case ethnographic description would be perhaps different to, but neither more nor less adequate than other forms of description.

This is the issue of validity and reliability. Since reliability refers to the reproducibility of research findings on different occasions or by different observers, it is not an especially relevant assessment criterion for ethnographic description. Validity, on the other hand, refers to the truthfulness of an account. If valid, according to Hammersley, it "represents accurately the features of the phenomenon" (69). This is a correspondence theory of truth, but one of selective representation rather than reproducing reality. Everything then, as Bernstein argues (1983: 168), depends on the quality of supporting evidence for validity claims. However, because absolute certainty is unattainable, the requirement is to offer evidence which is sufficiently credible for an account to be judged as beyond reasonable doubt.

The assessment of validity claims will be returned to at the end of this chapter (pages 94-96). For the moment it can be noted that, given the position of subtle realism as set out by Hammersley, in which the claim to absolute certainty of knowledge is rejected, the ethnographer can reasonably aspire to gaining proximity to social reality by means of what Clifford Geertz (borrowing from Gilbert Ryle) calls 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973: 6). Principally through its analytical character, this contrasts with the superficial quality of 'thin description'. It aims to be a systematic, methodical and intelligible approach to the interpretation of cultural structures of meaning. The social reality being referred to in this thesis as 'culture' has yet to be elaborated on and will be discussed in more detail presently, but for the moment it can be noted that Geertz (borrowing from Max Weber) defines culture in terms of socially established structures that he describes as

forming "webs of significance" in which the people of a community are suspended (5). These webs are the shared meaning systems which people construct in a complex network of interrelated concepts, or an interworked system of construable symbols (14). The ethnographer's task is to uncover these structures which are "superimposed upon or knotted into one another" (10), and "to construct a system of analysis" (27). This semiotic approach to culture will be returned to below (pages 76-80).

3. Generalisation of Ethnographic Results

In the introduction to this chapter it was noted that the ethnographic account of congregational culture at Riverstane Church, presented in Part Two of the thesis, is not concerned either with generating new theory or testing existing theory. Behind this is the wider question of drawing theoretical conclusions from ethnographic description. Hammersley points out that not all ethnographers are concerned with developing formal theory, and that nor should they be (64). Moreover, he questions the possibility for description to remain close to the particular and yet be able to reveal features of the general (that is, theory). This he calls the "myth of theoretical description" (12). However, the idea of spotting the general in the particular, in the sense used here, does not entail the search for 'universals'. Rather, it is more simply to identify themes arising from the ethnography which have broader relevance beyond the purely local setting. This is the comparative mode which is highlighted in the ESCA definition of ethnography (196):

The comparative perspective focuses ethnographic attention on trends and transitions, not just on similarities and differences at random (which are infinite). Rather than treating each ethnographic instance as unique (which in terms of extreme cultural relativism it is), ethnographers place the social phenomena they observe within comparative frames.

Among other problems with ethnography to which Hammersley draws attention are the objections that theory does not simply 'emerge' from data, that argument from the particular to the general entails the flaws of inductive reasoning, and that the hypothetico-deductive method requires an unattainable degree of manipulation and control of relevant variables which is more appropriate to the natural sciences. On the basis of these problems he concludes that ethnographic description should be distinguished from other description by virtue of "the explicitness and coherence of the models employed, and the rigour of the data collection and analysis", rather than by the idea of theoretical description (22). Geertz also admits that the development of theory from cultural interpretation "is more than usually difficult" (1973: 24). Instead, he highlights the process of generalising within cases rather than across cases (Geertz, 26). Accordingly, the thick description contained in Part Two of this thesis is an analysis of the cultural situation at Riverstane Church which attempts to present a coherent account of its features and how they interrelate. Then Part Three introduces theological reflection upon characteristics of congregational culture as described in Part Two. In so doing, its reasoning takes a divergent rather than convergent path by abstracting from the ethnographic account, but in such a way that is nevertheless dependent upon it.

As an example of the kind of generalisation which the ethnography of this thesis does not in fact attempt, although it may appear close to it, George Marcus (1986) offers a critique of the study by Paul Willis, Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs (Columbia University Press, 1981). Marcus explains (175):

This ethnography, arranged by topical headings, is presented as verbatim discussions among the lads, with the author present as interlocutor. Straightforward commentary elaborating on the discourse alternates with cuttings of dialogue from group discussions with Willis. There are occasional descriptions of the

atmosphere of the school as a place, but the reporting of dialogue is the main form of ethnographic evidence employed by Willis.

In some respects this is similar to the approach adopted in Part Two, for example in the alternation of interview extracts with commentary and description, and arranged under topical headings. However, the similarity ends with regard to the generalisation which follows. Marcus continues (175-176):

The most salient organizational move in the text is its bifurcation into a first part labelled "Ethnography" and a second part labelled "Analysis". Clearly Willis sees ethnography primarily as a method, and in text organization it must be set off and represented as such. The first part is presumably the data, but it is as much analysis as description. The second part, "Analysis", is really a theoretical reflection on the first part, as well as a manifesto for the value of ethnography in research on political economy. It relies on jargon and abstractions, but is rhetorically constructed upon references back to the naturalistic representation of the boys' culture in the first part...Thus, whether in fact, on close inspection, the theoretical discussions of part 2 can be derived from the ethnographic discussions of part 1 is an open question.

Again, Part Three of this thesis contains abstract reflection upon matters arising from the ethnographic account, but with the important difference that rather than being theoretical reflection, it is instead theological reflection. That is, it is not concerned with the development or testing of theory, but rather with bringing theological interpretation to features of the situation which are of more than local significance. Further, as was explained in Chapter One (page 23 above), there is no dichotomy being posited between data and analysis, as if Part Two were neutral description and Part Three detached evaluation, since by the nature of the ethnographic account it is already an interpretation.

B. Ethnography as the Interpretation of Culture

Following from the nature of thick description as indicated above, emphasis is placed on the gathering of cultural information in the field setting itself, both directly and indirectly. The various aspects of fieldwork will be described in the second part of this chapter, but before that the question of what is meant by the term 'culture' has to be addressed, since it is necessary to be clear on the nature of the hermeneutical object before looking at the method of interpretation.

1. Defining Culture

The encyclopaedia entry in SSE states that the term ethnography "refers to the study of the culture that a given group of people more or less share" (263). So far in this thesis there has been repeated reference to the idea of 'culture', but without elaborating on what is meant by the term in the context of this research. The definition offered by Clifford Geertz (in terms of "webs of significance") was referred to above, and he prefaces this by indicating the spread of definitions which are used. The discipline of anthropology arose around the idea of culture, and he argues that the concept needs to be pared down to keep it manageable. He cites one text which finds eleven different ways of defining culture, including "the total way of life of a people", "a way of thinking, feeling, and believing", and "learned behaviour" (4). It also compares culture to a map, a sieve, and a matrix. Geertz's point is that since there is no standard concept of culture, and because the many different nuances have their own strengths, it becomes necessary to make a choice.

Consistent with Geertz's shorthand formulation, "webs of significance", the anthropologist and historian James Axtell (quoted in Marty, 1991: 15) describes culture in terms of

meanings, values and norms differentially shared by the members of a society, which can be inferred from the non-instinctive behaviour of the group and from the symbolic products of their actions, including material artifacts, language, and social institutions.

This draws out some of the threads implicit in the Geertz statement. Meanings, values and norms are aspects of the symbol system of a community. Values are refracted through the use of symbols, to which people relate in multiple ways, and through codes of behaviour which govern their membership as insiders of the community. Being differentially shared, these things are held in common by insiders, yet interpreted differently from person to person, and evidenced in conscious, intentional, deliberate behaviours as well as in physical objects, organisational structures, and especially language. Another feature of this definition is that it presupposes the distinction between the insider's (emic) and outsider's (etic) perspectives, so that the activity of the researcher, as an outsider, is to make inferences about aspects of the culture which might be taken for granted by the insider. Like Geertz, James Spradley (1979: 5) also comments on the diffusion of definitions, numbering them in the hundreds, and he takes culture to be "the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behaviour". He comments:

The essential core of ethnography is this concern with the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand. Some of these meanings are directly expressed in language; many are taken for granted and communicated only indirectly through word and action. But in every society people make constant use of these complex meaning systems to organize their behavior, to understand themselves and others, and to make sense out of the world in which they live. These systems of meaning constitute their culture.

This again, with Geertz and Axtell, highlights the socially established structures of meaning, involving language, symbols, and behaviour, together with the aim of the interpreter (while having the perspective of an outsider) to gain access to the perspective of the insider.

The ethnographer, then, as one who is culturally an outsider and in that respect ignorant of what it means to be a cultural insider, seeks to learn from the members of the community. The posture is that of a participant observer taking part in a hermeneutical conversation rather than that of 'looking down a microscope' from a detached position. The result is intersubjective and comparative. As an outsider, the horizon of the researcher is part of the interpretative process in the fusion of horizons with the perspectives of insiders. However, Geertz warns against the confusion of either reifying culture as "a self-contained 'super-organic' reality with forces and purposes of its own", or reducing it to patterns of collective behaviour (11). The latter (which portrays culture as consensus) ignores the importance of differences in the ways people relate to their culture, while the former invokes historicist or determinist assumptions. On this point Anthony Cohen makes the comment (1993: 207):

There is a fundamental confusion here between culture as a body of substantive fact (which it is not) and as a body of symbolic form which provides means of expression but does not dictate what is expressed or the meaning of what is expressed. In this respect, culture is insubstantial: searching for it is like chasing shadows. It is not so much that it does not exist as that it has no ontology: it does not exist apart from what people do, and therefore what people do cannot be explained as its product. Culture can be invoked as a means of representing them - as, for example, when it is deployed as identity. But in those circumstances it must be regarded in the same way as any other symbolic expression: as being inherently meaningless but capable of substantiation at the discretion of those who use it - multireferential, multivocal, an infinitely variable tool.

Both these misconceptions will reappear in Chapter Three in connection with the idea of congregational culture, and the point that culture is not to be equated with consensus will be returned to on page 79 below. The approach to culture adopted here in terms of the symbol system of a community will now be described in more detail.

2. A Semiotic Approach to Culture

One of the consequences of this approach is that it becomes inappropriate to speak of 'the' culture of a community, because culture is experienced by people in multiple ways. This reflects its symbolically constructed or semiotic nature, implied by Geertz's term "webs of significance". Robert Schreier (1985: 49), in his chapter on the study of culture, devotes most of the discussion to semiotic approaches which he describes as holding "most promise for developing local theologies" because of its strengths in being an interdisciplinary approach to culture, in focusing upon the identity of local communities, and in being concerned with how cultures cope with change. He refers to semiotics as the study of signs as the bearers of meaning, and a semiotic approach to culture regards it as:

a vast communication network, whereby both verbal and nonverbal messages are circulated along elaborate, interconnected pathways, which, together, create the systems of meaning.

Anthony Thiselton (1986: 491) points out that while there are various ways of making the distinction between symbol and sign, symbols can be seen as a sub-class of signs:

Signs are physical objects, events, or human actions which point beyond themselves in such a way as to express some further reality, occurrence, or human conception. They may be linguistic or non-verbal; they may include natural phenomena or human artifacts, activities, gestures, or bodily postures. Verbal signs may include speech or writing.

Symbols, on the other hand

are born when they resonate at the deepest level with experiences or truths which are important for the corporate life and identity of a community.

As an example of the difference between sign and symbol, a national flag is symbolic in a way in which traffic lights are not. Symbols operate at the level of ideas in a way in which signs do not, so that the content of their symbolism may not be readily visible. With regard to the symbol system at Riverstone Church, this is important for Parts Two

and Three of this thesis, in which the symbolic nature of boundaries as ideas are seen to play a major part in constituting the identity of the congregation.

The semiotic approach to culture has its origins in linguistic theory, particularly that of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), who posited the interaction of linguistic units or signs so that they are defined in terms of their relation with each other, with the entities of language being the product of these relationships (Davis & Schleifer, 1989: 143-144). In a similar way, culture in a community can be seen as arising from the interaction of its symbols. This idea is contained in Geertz's metaphor of culture as a web of significance, or an interdependent network of meanings. Cohen writes (1993: 196):

we have come to see culture as the outcome and product of interaction; or, to put it another way, to see people as active in the creation of culture, rather than passive in receiving it.

Saussure also saw the linguistic sign as being arbitrary in its nature, so that "there is no natural and inevitable link between the signifier and the signified" (Culler, 1976: 19). Similarly, members of a community create their cultural meanings from whatever symbolic material may be available, but in themselves the symbols are meaningless apart from the meaning which people make with them. Again, Cohen comments (1993: 196)

Culture, in this view, is the means by which we make meaning, and with which we make the world meaningful to ourselves, and ourselves meaningful to the world. Its vehicle is the symbol. Symbols are quite simply carriers of meaning...symbols are inherently meaningless, they are not lexical; they do not have a truth value. They are pragmatic devices which are invested with meaning through social process of one kind or another.

Another feature of Saussure's theory is the distinction between diachronic and synchronic perspectives. A diachronic approach to language is concerned with its historicity and development over time, whereas a

synchronic approach focuses upon how it functions and is used without recourse to explanations in terms of cause and effect. There is a need for both approaches in ethnography. Hammersley (1992: 32) comments that to neglect "temporal patterns" in a field setting is to undermine the validity of the account. The entry which appears in ESCA (193) refers to this as being part of 'contextualization', a point on the anthropological triangle which it forms with 'comparison' as another point and ethnography at the apex. However, while the horizon of the community is indeed historically effected, interpretation begins with attention to the 'present present' rather than the 'present past' (page 29 above), with the meanings that are attached to symbols being inferred from the ways people currently use them.

Lastly, Saussure distinguished between language as parole and language as langue, the former being the performance of language as speech, and the latter being the system of language as social product which at the individual level people learn to use. Saussure writes, "In separating langue from parole, we are separating what is social from what is individual and what is essential from what is ancillary or accidental" (1974: 14). So also, in the study of culture the focus is upon the socially produced symbol system.

Spradley compares the semiotic view of culture with symbolic interactionism, a "theory which seeks to explain human behavior in terms of meanings" (1979: 6). He identifies three main premises of symbolic interactionism: that people act towards things in terms of the meanings they have for them (not the things themselves); that these meanings are shared and come out of social interaction; and that meanings are applied through an interpretative process used by the individual. This way, people use cultural symbols to interpret experience, which in turn contributes to the meaning attached to these symbols, forming an interdependent vocabulary within their local symbolic language. If the

idiolect of an individual speaker is the linguistic system of that person (a personal dialect), then culture can be seen as the symbolic idiolect of a community.

However, people belonging to the same community can relate differentially to their shared cultural symbols. Cohen writes (1987: 13):

Whilst the form of symbols may be common to those who bear the same culture, the meanings of the symbols, their contents, may differ. The crucifix, the clenched fist, the word 'love', the handshake, are all symbolic forms which we regard as commonplace and intelligible. But they do not carry their meaning inherently: in using them we impute meaning to them. Because of their very commonness we can use them competently with other people, exchange them - for that is what communication is - and yet mean different things by them, often being unaware of such differences.

As a result, just as it is inappropriate to speak of 'the' culture of a community, so it is to speak of 'the' meaning of a cultural symbol. On this point, Cohen makes the following comment (1985: 18):

Symbols are often defined as things 'standing for' other things. But they do not represent these 'other things' unambiguously...Because symbols are malleable in this way, they can be made to 'fit' the circumstances of the individual. They can thus provide media through which individuals can experience and express their attachment to a society without compromising their individuality. So versatile are symbols they can often be bent into these idiosyncratic shapes of meaning without such distortions becoming visible to other people who use the same symbol at the same time.

Furthermore, these differences in meaning may even be in tension with each other, since "people of radically opposed views can find their own meanings in what nevertheless remain common symbols" (1985: 18). To speak of culture as the symbols around which people gather, then, is not to equate culture with consensus. Rather (1985: 16):

when we speak of people acquiring culture, or learning to be social, we mean that they acquire the symbols which will equip them to be social...The reality of community in people's experience thus inheres in their attachment or commitment to a common body of symbols.

This attachment "is the means whereby communities contrive and preserve a sense of collective self" (1987: 19). In other words, it mediates communal identity and belonging (1982: 16): "Belonging is the almost inexpressibly complex experience of culture." This in turn leads to the positing of boundaries marking out that which the members of the community hold in common with each other as opposed to other social groups. Boundaries "discriminate the community from other places and groups" (1987: 14). Boundaries and identity are inextricable from each other (1993: 203-204):

The imperative need to posit culture as identity can arise...when there is a perceived threat to the distinctiveness of a group through its assimilation or the blurring of its boundaries, or as the consequence of internal differentiation or disagreement.

The themes of belonging, boundaries, identity, and internal differentiation will be of central importance both to the ethnographic account of congregational culture at Riverstane Church contained in Part Two and to the practical theological reflection in Part Three of this thesis.

II. Ethnographic Fieldwork

Having considered in the first part of this chapter the nature of ethnography as hermeneutical description and as the interpretation of culture, this part of the chapter is concerned, in general terms, with how the work of such description and interpretation proceeds.

To return to the encyclopaedia descriptions mentioned at the beginning, the SSE (263) notes that fieldwork "requires of the ethnographer the sustained, intimate and personal acquaintance" with what people say and do in their community. It adds:

There is, however, a good deal of variation in terms of just what activities are involved in fieldwork and, more critically, just how such activities result in a written depiction of culture. Current practices include intensive interviewing, count-and-classify

survey work, participation in everyday routines or occasional ceremonies engaged in by those studied, the collecting of samples of native behaviour across a range of broad situations, and so on.

The entry in ESCA notes that once ethnographers arrive in a field setting the task is not just to observe but to listen and to focus on "the viewpoints and concepts of the people (informants, subjects, actors, consultants) themselves" (196). It continues:

Ethnographers aim to document how the people see and talk about their everyday social activities and groupings, and the wider worlds they live in. It is their normal scenes of activity, topics of conversation and standards of evaluation that are the objects of ethnographic fieldwork.

It is important that fieldwork should involve the three distinct sources of cultural information: listening carefully to what people say, studying how people act, and examining the artefacts that they use. The symbol system of a culture is not only evidenced in language but also in what people do. Geertz comments on this (17):

Behavior must be attended to, and with some exactness, because it is through the flow of behavior - or, more precisely, social action - that cultural forms find articulation...Whatever, or wherever symbol systems "in their own terms" may be, we gain empirical access to them by inspecting events.

Cultural inferences, then, are made from these various indicators. Spradley (1979: 8) points out that absolute certainty in making such inferences is not guaranteed, but that with the use of checking strategies in the course of conducting fieldwork, close attention to these indicators can lead to adequate cultural description. The checking strategies deployed in the study of congregational culture at Riverstone Church will be described in Chapter Four (on pages 157-158). This part of the chapter will now consider in more detail the process of studying what people do and say.

A. Participant Observation

Observation in the sense used here is not that of a scientist making detached judgements, but an intersubjective engagement with the people of the community in order to gain an understanding of their culture. This emphasis is inherent in the actual terminology which characterises the observation as being 'participant'. In this connection Danny Jorgensen writes (1989: 48, 56):

Participant observation, unlike survey research or experiments, does not have human 'subjects'. Rather, situations in which human beings are involved are observed under otherwise natural conditions. People are not manipulated or controlled in any way resembling the design of other kinds of research...Accurate (objective and truthful) findings are more rather than less likely as the researcher becomes involved directly, personally, and existentially with people in daily life...Participation reduces the possibility of inaccurate observation, because the researcher gains through subjective involvement direct access to what people think, do, and feel from multiple perspectives.

Although at times a participant observer may be more observer than participant or more participant than observer, the key is to be exclusively neither. In this way the world of everyday life from the point of view of insiders is engaged so as to "uncover, make accessible, and reveal the meanings (realities) people use to make sense out of their everyday lives" (15).

Participant observation can be conducted in virtually any social setting. Spradley (1979: iii) sees it as a "tool for understanding ourselves", for seeing in a fresh way cultural features which are normally taken for granted and left unexplored, with the task of the participant observer being to 'render the familiar strange'. On this point, Hammersley comments (1992: 33):

We often discover that there are features of even the most familiar settings of which we are unaware, recognition of which may subtly, perhaps even dramatically, change our understanding of those settings.

However, there are a number of difficulties which can become obstacles to successful participant observation. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, insiders can obscure from an outsider such as a participant observer the cultural meanings which they manage and negotiate in their interactions with one another (Jorgensen, 14). Moreover (60):

Most human settings, however, do not give up the insiders' world of meaning and action except to a person willing to become a member. The deeper meanings of most forms of human existence are not displayed for outsiders.

For that reason the gaining of entrée to the field setting, which itself is far from being a straightforward matter, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for gaining access to the insiders' world of meaning and action. Beyond this it is also necessary to establish and then to maintain a strong level of rapport with insiders, again something which may not be a straightforward matter, especially where there is a marked internal differentiation among members of a community (45):

It usually is not possible to sustain friendly relations with rival parties under conditions of extreme conflict...During any extended time period, access to the activities of one faction or stratum of a setting most likely will prohibit similar access to the activities of rival factions or unequal strata.

Further, Jorgensen comments on the tensions in which the researcher may be caught with regard to the various participant roles adopted (61):

In appropriating roles from the setting, you may experience problems managing self-concept...Roles experienced as conflictual with your other roles and your concept of self are difficult to sustain for any length of time.

As a result of such difficulties, participant observation can make demands upon the personal resources of the researcher in such a way that has implications for the length of time spent in the field setting.

Chapter Four of this thesis will describe participant observation in more detail with regard to the approach taken in the fieldwork conducted at Riverstane Church. Having outlined here something of the nature of participant observation as a means of studying what people do in their community, the next section of this chapter turns to the matter of studying what people say.

B. Ethnographic Interviews

As the encyclopaedia entry in ESCA (196) indicates, the conducting of ethnographic interviews is held over until an adequate degree of participant observation has taken place:

Interviews become useful at later stages of fieldwork; participant observation begins by listening to what British anthropologist Audrey Richards called 'speech in action.'...As this initial stage of the ethnographic process develops, the fieldworker must constantly make decisions about where to be, whom to listen to, what events to follow, and what safely to ignore.

While this distinguishes between studying what people do and studying what they say, the two are always kept together.

The "paramount aim" of the ethnographer

is to listen, and to move as quickly as possible into natural settings of social life, the places people would be, doing what they would be doing, if the ethnographer were not there...One side of ethnography is unmediated by communication with the actors. As observers, ethnographers watch, count, and record...The other side of ethnographic work consists of speech events, scenes of communication in which the ethnographer is a passive or active participant.

These events of 'speech in action' relate to all situations, such as the spontaneous exchanges which take place between people in passing, or what is sometimes referred to as 'corridor talk', or circles where people are chatting naturally, or casual conversations in which people share their news and opinions. Access to all these situations is central to building up not only rapport and the researcher's cultural competence, but especially the cultural information needed to assess which people, activities, places, events

and objects to focus upon, and which to leave aside. Spradley comments that, "Because language is the primary means for transmitting culture from one generation to the next, much of any culture is encoded in linguistic form" (1979: 9).

However, ethnographic interviews are distinct from occasions of speech in action on account of their pre-arranged nature under the control of the researcher. The entry in ESCA continues (197):

Usually after some initial period of fieldwork (a few months, perhaps), interviews may begin. This class of speech events is disruptive...by transforming an everyday location into a scene of ethnographer-informant dialogue (an activity that otherwise would not be occurring there). Typically the earliest of these deliberate breaks in time-place flow reserve topicality for the actor. In such open-ended (or discovery) interviews, the informant moves the conversation according to his or her own interests.

The term 'informant' illustrates a feature of ethnographic writing in general, in that it can employ standard vocabulary with a technical sense which is related to but not quite the same as the conventional sense. In normal usage, the term 'informant' can have a negative connotation such as 'spy' or 'gossip', whereas in the ethnographic sense it refers more neutrally to a person whose ordinary discourse is formally attended to with a view to building up cultural information. This potential for confusion also applies to the content of interviews. Even though the ethnographer and the informants may share the same linguistic background in terms of mother tongue, it does not necessarily follow that the researcher understands the interviewees with cultural competence. While the interpreter's own concepts form an essential horizon in the hermeneutical conversation, it is the meanings intended by the informants which impart cultural information, and a grasp of these is required for the fusion of horizons to take place.

Germane to this is the question of values in ethnographic description. It is not a matter of whether there are values present, but rather which values and whose values. The informant acts essentially as an instructor, and in that sense alerts the researcher to discern those features which have significance for the interpretation of culture. But equally the values of the ethnographer contribute to the hermeneutical conversation, and so it becomes incumbent both to give an account of these values and to ensure that methods used to gain access to cultural information are effective. With regard to the researcher's values, it is necessary for the ethnography to be self-reflexive, and in connection with the methods of investigation there have to be checking strategies. In the context of the ethnography of this thesis, both these matters are dealt with in Chapter Four.

In one sense an informant can be any person with whom the researcher comes into contact in the field setting, whether in exchanging casual comments or making ordinary conversation. However, the choice of people as key informants for ethnographic interviews is important for the quality of the data gathered. The ethnographer has to make decisions, according to the constraints of the field setting, about who would be suitable, and this can be decisive for the quality of cultural information obtained. On this point, Jorgensen comments (1989: 43):

Within almost every complex organisation there are cliques of people whose activities are kept secret from nonmembers. Locating these settings is extremely difficult without prior experience with more visible aspects of these human scenes. This knowledge may be acquired by gaining the trust and confidence of an insider willing to talk with you.

Spradley (1979: 45) lists five requirements for the selection of good informants: they should be thoroughly enculturated (not persons who are culturally marginal), they should be currently involved in the setting, they should have contact with cultural scenes (particular social

situations in the field setting) which are unfamiliar to the researcher, they should have adequate time to spare the researcher, and they should not speak in an analytical mode using terms which are foreign to their own culture. To this it could be added that the choice of informants should reflect the various different groupings of people in the setting in such a way that does not give undue weight to any in particular. Also, informants should not be self-selecting since it is possible that those who are most willing to volunteer their help can also be marginalised persons.

This section of the chapter has outlined the place of ethnographic interviews in the study of culture. A more detailed account follows in Chapter Four of this thesis with reference to the ethnographic interviews conducted at Riverstane Church.

III. The Ethnographic Account

To recall the double meaning of the term 'ethnography' to refer to both the process and the product of research, and having considered something of the ethnographic process above, this final part of the chapter now turns to the product of ethnography, namely the written representation of culture.

A. Styles of Ethnographic Account

According to the SSE (263), ethnography as product varies "in terms of its topical, stylistic and rhetorical features":

Partly a response to critics located outside ethnographic circles who wonder just how personal experience serves as the basis for a scientific study of culture, some ethnographers make visible - or, more accurately, textualize - their discovery practices and

procedures. Confessional ethnography results when the fieldwork process itself becomes the focus in an ethnographic text. Its composition rests on moving the fieldworker to centre stage and displaying how the writer comes to know a given culture...Dramatic ethnographies, for example, rest on the narration of a particular event or sequence of events of apparent significance to the cultural members studied. Such ethnographies present an unfolding story and rely more on literary techniques drawn from fiction than on plain-speaking, documentary techniques - 'the style of non-style' - drawn from scientific reports. Critical ethnographies provide another format wherein the represented culture is located within a larger historical, political, economic, social and symbolic context than is said to be recognised by cultural members.

The ethnographic account presented in Part Two of this thesis shares some aspects of each of these genres while not conforming wholly to any one of them. With respect to the confessional approach, an account is indeed given of the fieldwork path in Chapter Four. However, while the position occupied by the researcher is either downstage or backstage, at no point does it become centre stage. Also, since it is largely presented in other than a narrative style, the ethnography is not strictly a dramatic account. However, this is not to say that narrative or rhetorical elements are entirely absent within a more general framework which follows 'the style of non-style'. Again, aspects of critical ethnography are present since in Part Three a critical theological perspective is brought to bear upon the documented cultural interpretation contained in Part Two. This is not to say, however, that it is purely an outsider's critique of congregational culture at Riverstane Church, since it is partly guided by dissonant aspects of insiders' own experiences. Nor is it purely a critique since these matters are given theological consideration with a view to the possibility for transformation.

The decision with regard to genre of writing in the ethnographic account is determined by the kind of readership involved. For example, as the SSE explains, a non-technical

audience might prefer (264):

the storytelling and allegorical nature of an ethnography...Such readers look for familiar formats - the traveller's tale, the adventure story, the investigative report.

However, for the purposes of this thesis it was decided that a form of the fourth style identified in the SSE entry would be appropriate, namely 'realist' ethnography: an observer presenting a selective description of congregational life, the selection being guided by the perspectives of insiders, with supporting evidence drawn from ethnographic interviews and participant observation being included within the body of the text. As a result, extracts from interviews and fieldnote accounts are cited at length in Part Two of the thesis. One disadvantage of the realist style is that sometimes it can appear to suggest a position of detached objectivity. This is a rhetorical effect created by the seeming absence of the ethnographer within the written account, thereby enhancing its naturalistic appearance. However, in the SSE definition of ethnography, the genre of ethnographic realism is recognised as being the most common mode in writing about a culture.

The variety of genres in ethnographic accounts leads to questions of how they are constructed, what their limitations are, and how they are to be judged. The remainder of the chapter now turns to these matters in the sections that follow.

B. Writing Ethnographic Accounts

The material out of which an ethnographic account develops is the body of notes and interview transcriptions gathered from the field setting. However, fieldnotes can be in the form of anything from brief jottings, sometimes referred to as 'scratch notes' (Ottenberg, 1990: 148), to formal survey material. As James Clifford writes (1990: 52):

there can be no rigorous definition of what constitutes a fieldnote. The community of ethnographers agrees on no common boundaries: diaries and journals are included by some, excluded by others; letters to family, to colleagues, to thesis supervisors are diversely classified.

Another category of fieldnote (which featured in the development of this research) is that of interim fieldwork reports submitted to thesis supervisors. Each of these various forms of notes might contain a mixture of material comprising cultural information and "personal reactions, frustrations, and assessments of life and work in the field" (Sanjek, 1990: 108).

But as well as written material, there are also fieldnotes in the form of 'headnotes' (Ottenberg, 1990: 144). The ESCA definition of ethnography refers to these as "the stored memories and interpretations that arise from direct participant observation" (197), and are seen as being an essential component to the process of writing an ethnographic account. Some social anthropologists even regard notebooks as a hindrance and give priority to their headnotes, so that they consider themselves to be a kind of living fieldnote (Jackson, 1990: 21-23). This can also extend beyond matters of noetic recollection. Judith Okley speaks of embodied knowledge and memory (1992: 16):

Anthropologists, immersed for extended periods in another culture or in their own as a participant observer learn not only through the verbal, the transcript, but through all the senses, through movement, through their bodies and whole being... Writing up is more than the 'pure cerebration' it has sometimes been made out to be. Fieldnotes may be no more than a trigger for bodily and hitherto subconscious memories.

Far from being an objectively detached account, then, the self-reflexivity of ethnography introduces elements of autobiography with regard to the horizon of the interpreter.

It is one thing to have accumulated a collection of fieldnotes and headnotes, but in the production of an

ethnographic account the material has to be organised and marshalled constructively with a view to making sense of the cultural information. In the ESCA definition of ethnography, the process linking fieldnotes and ethnographic accounts is described as involving two continuously developing activities (198). One is the writing of outlines or draft material, which is referenced as appropriate to comparative theoretical ideas and contextual sources of data (the other two points of the anthropological triangle). Then fieldnote evidence is considered against this, which entails the second activity of indexing the research material with respect to the topics arising in the outlines. Jorgensen (1989: 107) expresses the same process in terms of

breaking up, separating, or disassembling of research materials into pieces, parts, elements, or units. With facts broken down into manageable pieces, the researcher sorts and sifts them, searching for types, classes, sequences, processes, patterns, or wholes. The aim of this process is to assemble or reconstruct the data in [a] meaningful or comprehensible fashion.

The process involves repeated iterations until the decision is taken to bring it to a close, a decision which can be determined by working deadlines or by the pressure of other matters. In any case, as Van Maanen puts it, the "analysis is not finished, only over" (1988: 120).

The approach taken to the analysis of fieldnotes in this research will be more specifically described in Chapter Four (on page 159 below). Having outlined here the basic elements in constructing ethnographic accounts, the question then arises as to their associated problems.

C. Limitations of Ethnographic Accounts

It was already noted above that different ethnographic styles have their inherent shortcomings, such as the seeming objectivism which can sometimes accompany realist accounts. However, there are more fundamental limitations which apply

to ethnographies in general. These are of a relativising rather than an invalidating nature, so that by having an awareness of them the researcher is less likely to make undue claims about the status of an ethnographic account.

The hermeneutical issue of representation was discussed earlier in the chapter (on pages 64-68 above), and James Clifford identifies a number of factors which restrict the ability of ethnography accurately to represent culture (1986: 6). Being a literary work, the use of tropes and creative devices have the effect of depicting culture in a stylised form. Also, ethnographies are constrained contextually (by social milieux), rhetorically (by conventions of expression), institutionally (by their collegial commitments), generically (by their literary form), and historically (by the changing nature of all these constraints). Further, the multivocal nature of culture is reduced to a single voice or at most a few, where in a full representation of culture an event would be "given meaning first in one way, then another, and then still another" (Van Maanen, 1988: 52). Lastly, while culture is fluid, ethnography tends to present it as being relatively static.

Stephen Linstead (1993: 104) points out that the problem of representation operates at two levels: that of re-presenting experience in terms of another perspective (a hermeneutical question), and the representativeness of the account (a political question). One way of compensating for its hermeneutical limitations is for representation to have the function of evoking as well as referring: "Evocation is part of the poetic function of language; it evokes that which escapes reference" (105). Again, since an ethnographic account cannot be a straightforward 'reproduction' of culture but only an interpretation, neither can it be a full account. However, as a selective representation of culture it can be rationally defended by arguments supporting the relevances which form the basis for its selectivity.

Selective representation is also an issue with regard to the multivocal nature of culture. Ethnography as 'discourse' rather than as 'text' is concerned with dialogue rather than monologue. Stephen Tyler describes this as a "post-modern ethnography" which evokes "a possible world of commonplace reality" (1986: 125-126):

It is, in a word, poetry - not in its textual form, but in its return to the original context and function of poetry, which, by means of its performative break with everyday speech, evoked memories of the ethos of the community and thereby provoked hearers to act ethically.

This is a return to the idea of "the ethical character of all discourse, as captured in the ancient significance of the family of terms, 'ethos', 'ethnos', 'ethics'" (126). But it then becomes necessary to represent all fragments of discourse, which raises political questions. Linstead comments on the complexities of this (107):

In presenting the range of voices and fragments of the culture under study...and in seeking not to impose textual authority or suppression on them...the ethnographer must presumably resist the temptation to exalt those voices which the culture itself silences.

However, not to represent silenced voices would be to endorse the ideologies in a culture, and perhaps to replicate its injustices. Accordingly, there can be circumstances where it is appropriate for those voices in a culture which are least heard to have their hermeneutical privilege acknowledged. This is a point that will be returned to in Chapter Four (on page 153 below).

The issue of representation leads to another limitation. Since an ethnographic account is a written text, there is the question of its formal relation to what it claims to represent. The object of interpretation - culture - is for practical reasons being studied semiotically as a text, but as Mark Hobart emphasises (1985: 35):

Culture is not a text (however understood), nor a set of rules, nor even a discourse. It may be useful for a specific purpose to regard culture, for a moment, as if it were a text, a discourse, or whatever; and members of particular cultures may write texts, hold discourse

and act according to rules. But culture is complex and cannot be captured in any single metaphor.

Metaphor functions on the basis of similarity-in-difference, and indeed Hobart goes on to highlight the inherent differences between text and culture which are contained in Paul Ricoeur's metaphor of meaningful human action considered as a text (Ricoeur, 1991). As a result of this, there is a formal disparity between the object of interpretation (culture) and the metaphor used to objectify it (text), and thereby a corresponding disparity with the deposited account of culture which is the ethnographic text. This is not so much because of its selectivity, but rather on account of its genre. As Cohen points out, however, provided the limitations of the model are accepted, it is not necessary to go to the length articulated by Hobart, who concludes that the idea of culture as text is a confidence trick (1987: 19).

Discussion of the rationale behind the selectivity in the ethnographic account of Riverstane Church, contained in Part Two of the thesis, will appear in Chapter Four (on pages 163-165 below). In view of the inherent limitations of ethnographic accounts described above, the question then arises as to how they are to be assessed, and this is now considered in the final section of this chapter.

D. Assessing Ethnographic Accounts

In the earlier discussion of validity and reliability (on pages 68-70 above), it was noted that reliability - the repeatability of research findings - is not an especially relevant criterion for assessing ethnography. Sanjek writes that in contrast to scientific research (1990: 394):

We cannot expect and do not hope that another investigator will repeat the fieldwork and confirm the results before they are published...As Honigmann correctly puts it: "Speaking realistically, there is practically a zero probability of ever testing the

reliability of a comprehensive ethnographic report, so one ought to stop talking about replication as a technique of verification".

Hammersley points out that in any case reliability is concerned with the likelihood of results being invalid, so that it deals with methods of research rather than the results themselves (1992: 67). For this reason it is validity, the degree to which observations correspond to what they purport to represent, that is the key to evaluating ethnographic accounts. To this Hammersley would also add the relevance of the research (68). Although the idea of validity involves a correspondence theory of truth, it is one of selective representation rather than the reproduction of reality (69). Validity can only be assessed on the basis of supporting evidence for the claims being made, and in practical terms this means reaching a point where the ethnographic account is regarded as being beyond reasonable doubt. The implication for this thesis is that there will be ample reference to interview and other material in the body of the text when setting out the ethnography which appears in Part Two.

Compromises to validity would lie, for example, in neglecting to take account of the historically effected horizon of the community. This would result from a synchronic perspective which ignores the diachronic dimension of culture (Hammersley, 32). Also, the neglect of relevant contextual factors, and comparative theoretical resources which have a bearing on the research, would be a further compromise to validity (ESCA: 198). Equally important is the need to give adequate attention to the horizon of the researcher in terms of value and factual assumptions, justifying these where necessary, and discussing the ways in which these might affect the interpretation of culture in the field setting, so as to minimise researcher bias (Hammersley, 25). Also, the relevances and selectivities in the research design which have shaped the gathering of cultural information and its

analysis have to be taken into account, as well as the mode of presentation. Moreover, an approach which assumes a consensus view of culture, focusing on patterns and commonalities, would overlook the normal differentiation which exists within a culture.

The above remarks are summarised in the three canons of validity identified by Sanjek (ESCA: 198):

The first of these is theoretical candour, the openness with which the ethnographer addresses the significant theories and the local theories of significance that structured the fieldwork process. A second canon calls for explicit depiction of the fieldworker's path - the number of informants from whom information was obtained, in what ways, and their relationship both to the wider population the ethnography concerns and to each other. A third canon concerns information about the fieldnote evidence itself: not simply 'how much' and its basis in participant observation or interviews but more significantly the precise relationship of notes and records to the written ethnography. Some ethnographies utilize fieldnotes directly, even masses of them; others, for rhetorical or narrative purposes do not. What matters in the end is that readers of an ethnography have a clear picture of what the ethnographer did and why, whom they talked to and learned from, and what they brought back to document it.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced ethnography as a hermeneutically conceived method for interpreting culture in a community. It was considered necessary to include this extended discussion here so as to anticipate what lies ahead in Part Two of the thesis and also to provide clarity on the nature, limits, and central concepts of ethnography, since the lack of adequate attention to these matters in the literature on congregational studies is reflected in the lack of ethnographic detail in its practical theological reflection.

The goal of the method is to produce a valid ethnographic account through attention to the three main sources of cultural information: what people say, what people do, and the artefacts they use. In the process of participant observation and ethnographic interviews it seeks to gain access to the meaning systems of insiders. The intersubjective nature of ethnography involves the researcher as an outsider engaging in a hermeneutical conversation with cultural insiders, resulting in a fusion of their horizons.

The next chapter closes Part One of the thesis by returning to the theme of interpreting congregational culture. It considers some of the approaches which appear in the literature and contrasts these with the ethnographic approach of this research which begins in Part Two.

Interpreting Congregational Culture

Introduction

So far, Part One of this thesis has discussed hermeneutical matters relating to the interpretation of situations (Chapter One), and has presented ethnography as an appropriate social research method for the interpretation of culture in communities (Chapter Two). This closing chapter of Part One now turns attention to the social situation of those communities which are congregations.

The practical theological value of congregational studies follows from the limits of reflection that is based largely upon non-empirical notions of the local church in abstract. Congregations only exist as historically situated social entities located in specific urban, suburban, inner city, city centre, rural, semi-rural, town, or village settings within local socioeconomic and political contexts. That is, they do not exist apart from their own particularity, which in certain respects is like all other, like some other, and like no other congregations. This then has implications for practical theological reflection, so that the discussion on mission and the pastoral context contained in Part Three of this thesis arises from the issues and challenges that are specific to the situation at Riverstane. As a result, this in turn has the potential to shed light on other situations. Gregory Bateson (1973: 428) defines a unit of information as "a difference which makes a difference", and similarly the study of a particular congregation can be seen as a unit of interpretation which can contribute to making a difference to the way church life, mission, and the pastoral context is reflected upon in Practical Theology.

This is congruent to the approach of Robert Schreiter (1985) who, although not referring specifically to congregations, regards theology as being a series of local theologies (32). In that sense, the study of congregations can be regarded as a form of local theology (13):

Local theologies of the ethnographic variety of contextual approach strive to answer questions of identity especially. Their particular strength lies in beginning with the questions that the people themselves have - not those posed immediately by other Christian churches or those necessary for a systematic understanding of faith. In other words, they try to initiate a dialogue with Christian tradition whereby that tradition can address questions genuinely posed by the local circumstances...leading to a theology enhancing the identity of a local community.

Among the general difficulties of ethnographic approaches as identified by Schreiter, those which relate most to this research concern the possibility of disregarding conflict in the situation out of a desire to preserve harmony, and the tendency to romanticise culture in such a way that avoids any vigorous dialogue with gospel values. (The other two problems concern lack of time to complete the project and lack of participation in the community being studied.) With regard to conflictual factors in the situation, a central theme of this research is the micro-political nature of congregational life (discussed in Chapter Seven), and on the question of romanticism it will be seen that aspects of micro-political behaviour are viewed by congregants themselves to be somewhat in conflict with Christian values.

However, it still remains to justify the focus of this research upon congregational culture. Congregations are many things: communities of worship, of celebration, of faith, of memory, of hope, of encouragement, of moral practice. Further, these characteristics reflect the distinctive nature of 'congregation' in contrast to other forms of community. So if churches are markedly different to other social entities, the question then arises as to why 'culture' should be made a focus of congregational research

at all, especially if it is something which is not a defining characteristic of churches but instead relates to communities in general. It could be argued that it should be the distinguishing features of congregation as a type of community which are studied rather than more universal constructs such as culture. In any case, the assumption is being made that congregations in fact have cultures, and so a further question arises as to the basis for positing the existence of congregational culture in the first place. Lastly, even granting this assumption, there is still the question as to what congregational culture is.

The first part of this chapter takes up these questions, followed in the second part by a consideration of some examples of congregational studies, with particular reference to ethnographic approaches. These are contrasted with the ethnographic approach adopted here regarding congregational culture at Riverstane Church, as will be developed in Part Two of the thesis.

I. Culture and Social Organisation

The document 'Situation Analysis' (1979), prepared by the Urban Theology Unit in Sheffield is a useful starting point in this connection. This unpublished course material takes the form of an inventory designed to facilitate building up a picture of the locality in which a church is situated, including a basic profile of the congregation and its engagement with the local community. It specifies relevant categories with respect to the 'place', the community, and the church. Then questions are asked in relation to what is going on locally which has Christian significance; on what impinges on the church or the Christian scene; on how the church impinges on the 'world', the place, and the community; on who holds power in the world, the place, and the community; and on what the church is supporting (good

and bad) or could support, and trying to change or could change, in the world, the place, and the community. Finally it puts the question of what are (in order of priority) the top ten things for sorrow, and for joy, in the community, the church, and the world.

This instrument is essentially a praxis-oriented approach to situation analysis, and as such is a useful guide to assessing the opportunities for significant congregational activity in a given local setting. However, it also touches on cultural aspects of congregational life: how leadership and the congregation are related, the level of congregational participation, the recent history, the distribution of cliques or affinity groups, the process of decision-making, the unexpected goings-on, the ethos of the congregation and its impact upon the stranger, and so on. These matters relate to the social processes of congregations; for, whatever else they may be, congregations are primarily social entities.

The document on situation analysis is not intended to be more than an aid to appraising relevant factors in a setting with a view to identifying areas of priority for the work of congregational mission. But it is significant that the socially defined nature of congregational life is recognised as a relevant factor in mission. This is a theme that will be returned to in Chapter Eight when the relationship between congregational culture and congregational mission at Riverstane Church is discussed. Here, the social nature of congregations will now be considered.

A. Congregations as Social Organisations

An early statement of the socially defined nature of congregations appears in an important article on systems theory and pastoral care by Mansell Pattison, in which he

refers to "the nature of the church as a social system in the general sociocultural milieu" (1972: 9). The significance of his approach lies in its shift away from pastoral care which is focused exclusively upon the individual without regard to the larger social unit in which the situation is framed. In this view the social system of the congregation is "seen as a sociocultural force influencing human behavior". In common with other systems perspectives, though, this offers a somewhat mechanistic view of the forces acting upon human behaviour. The social system in the first place consists of what people do, so that it cannot be seen in turn as an explanation for what people do. However, Mansell's insight is nevertheless, as George Furniss refers to it, "a real paradigmatic breakthrough" (Furniss, 1995: 13).

Furniss describes the systems perspective as viewing "the local parish church as a living organism with functional subsystems", and this leads to the idea of the "organizational health or sickness of the congregation" (12). Again, this is a metaphor which tends to reify the social dimension in terms of an entity that, like mind and body, is somehow generated by the corporeality of the organisation. On the theme of organisational health, one example of this is in the gestalt approach of Uri Merry and George Brown with regard to the neurotic behaviour of organisations (1987). They compare Fritz Perls' ideas of neurotic individual behaviour with phenomena at the level of organisational behaviour (20). These are (a) repetitive patterns of (b) pathologic, (c) seemingly unchangeable (d) organisational behaviour, (e) involving a distortion of reality. In distorting reality, people

are not in touch with important aspects of what is really happening inside the organization or in its environment. The collective phenomenon of the organization has distorted reality and replaced it with an imaginary, fantasy-based distortion of reality. The organization has created an intermediate zone of illusion between itself and the world.

The point is not that the organisation generates a super-organic reality (Geertz, 1973: 11), but rather that in the social psychology of the organisation there are sufficient points of comparison with aspects of individual psychology to justify a description in those terms. It is a genuinely collective phenomenon but not distinct from the level of what people do: "The behaviour emanates from the interdependence and interaction of people" (Merry and Brown, 1987: 20). It is possible, then, to describe the socially defined nature of an organisation in corporate terms without reifying the social processes into a quasi-autonomous entity, and this is a matter that will be returned to in Chapter Nine regarding the narcissistic orientation of congregational culture at Riverstane Church.

B. Organisational Culture

The idea of culture in organisations has been the locus of some confusion in the way it tends to be used in management theory. In the 1970s, organisation theory shifted its attention from the sphere of formal organisational structure (relating to the performance of operational activities) to that of informal organisation (the level of social processes). As Furniss notes (1995: 116):

The newer interest in informal structure deals with less easily quantifiable factors: not the ideal world of organizational charts - how things are supposed to work - but the actual world of employee morale, interaction, and leadership. Studies done by sociologists...had much earlier identified how informal structures often subverted the formal structures.

Helen Schwartzman points out that it was the human relations school which originally introduced the term 'culture' to organisational theory but, in so doing, formulated it in terms of the management model of industrial relations (1993: 25-26). The result was a management model of culture such that it became something to be defined by chiefs of corporation and then implemented across the organisation.

As a cultural engineering model its concern is not to understand the informal organisation but rather to shape it, so that it becomes something like an extension of formal organisation.

Accordingly, this is the notion of corporate culture adopted by Furniss (1995: 117):

The organizational culture is...a definition of the situation carried in the heads of corporate officers, a standpoint enforced throughout the organization by means of policy and procedure.

Contrasting with this instrumental approach has been the increasing return of ethnographic studies in the workplace and other organisations, a research area which until the 1950s had indeed previously been a focus of Social Anthropology. Schwartzman highlights ethnographic concern with features of organisational culture which are not addressed by the management or engineering model: the interplay between formal and informal aspects of organisational life, the everyday routines of people, and the features which informants themselves identify as being significant (1993: 38). This is a concern with culture as people experience it rather than as a management conception.

The management approach is exemplified by Charles Handy in a chapter with the title "On the Cultures of Organizations". He refers to organisational culture as "sets of values and norms and beliefs" (1985: 185) and associates various metaphors of formal organisational structure with differing types of culture, but adds that it "cannot be precisely defined, for it is something that is perceived, something felt" (197). Again, he also discusses the idea of designing organisations by selecting the appropriate types of culture in advance, along the lines of a form-follows-function strategy (206). That is, culture is regarded as something which is to be engineered.

Anthony Cohen (1987: 214) offers a social anthropological critique of this approach, citing a similar example from organisation theory (published in the same year as Handy) which defines culture as "shared meanings and common understanding". Cohen writes:

This naive belief that members of 'a company' share 'meanings' and 'understanding', and are thereby differentiated from the members of other companies, goes some way towards explaining the less than brilliant recent history of British institutions. It is an anodyne and innocent view of the complexities of organisation.

However, in some of the most recent organisation theory there is an increasing awareness that organisational culture is not characterised by uniformity of beliefs, meanings, or understandings. In the June 1996 edition of Management Review the theme of diversity in organisations is taken up, and an article with the title 'Managing Diversity' contains a statement which probably would not have appeared in management theory a decade earlier (Capowski, 1996: 13): "Diversity is a reality...Gone are the days when businesses could say, 'This is our culture. Conform or leave.'" This is a step towards a more nuanced position, but the article title still contains the idea that, in business, diversity is something to be 'managed'.

In summary, then, the approach to culture in organisation theory is inadequate for the purposes of this research on three counts: it regards culture as something which can be 'created' rather than as a social process; it tends to misconceive culture in terms of consensus (shared values, beliefs, meanings, understandings); or, when it does not, it still regards culture as being essentially part of the management remit. In particular, with regard to this thesis, even though congregations are organisations, the idea of culture as it appears in organisation theory has limited value for the study of congregational culture, the nature of which is now considered in the next section.

C. Congregational Culture

It is one thing to speak of the culture of those communities which are conventionally associated with ethnographic research, but the question remains concerning what is meant by the idea of congregational culture. Communities in the conventional sense consist of people who reside in the same locality, who belong to the same village or settlement, who live on the same island or housing estate. Congregations are different, and there are different types of congregation. At Riverstane Church, for example, being in a city centre location the congregants are gathered from a large area and generally do not live locally to each other. In any case, even when they gather together it is not for much more than an hour or so a week. In the terms articulated by Ferdinand Tönnies (1955), the congregation at Riverstane is as much Gesellschaft (association) as it is Gemeinschaft (community). Further, communities in the proper sense are defined as social organisations, whereas churches are in the category of formal organisations (Schein, 1988: 16). The idea of congregations having cultures at all, then, requires some justification if the term 'culture' is being applied ethnographically.

The groundwork for this is provided in the semiotic conception of culture as described in Chapter Two (on page 76 above). With regard to congregations such as Riverstane, even if they only gather for short periods on a weekly basis, they nevertheless are social entities constructed around the symbolic systems of their collective life. This symbolic dimension, while ultimately located in people's minds, is refracted in what people say and do. Accordingly, Clifford Geertz notes (1973: 17):

It is through the flow of behavior - or, more precisely, social action - that cultural forms find articulation...Whatever, or wherever symbol systems "in their own terms" may be, we gain empirical access to them by inspecting events.

However, the term 'congregational culture' is sometimes used more loosely. Furniss, for example, clearly adopts an organisation theory approach (1995: 118):

The local church itself has an organizational culture that defines its particular identity and its operational goals. In the congregational context, pastoral caregivers may be under pressure to conform the care process to such institutional goals as membership growth or strategic targeting of particular groups.

In an article with the title 'The Congregation as A Culture: Implications for Ministry', Nancy Ramsay states that "Culture is simply the way things are" (1992: 41). While this is elaborated to involve stories, symbols, rituals, values and norms, the assumption is that culture is a given state of affairs, a reified "body of substantive fact (which it is not)" (Cohen, 1993: 207). Even etymologically there are problems with the substantival view. Henk Woldring explains that the word 'culture', from cultura, is derived from colere, a verb with the original sense of cultivating soil and which came to mean any activity of forming (1996: 1). He adds:

The verb colere concerns therefore a certain attitude and a particular manner of acting and not merely the results of that acting. That is why we must take the noun 'culture' not merely to denote a state of affairs, but especially to denote an action; we must understand it not so much in a nominal sense as in a verbal sense.

That is, culture is a matter of what people do (and say) rather than "the way things are". Also, while Ramsay emphasises the uniqueness of congregations in their respective cultures, and how this is reflected in the differences from church to church, she does not bring to the concept of culture a sense of the differences that occur within particular congregations. A "pluralism [among] congregations of the same denomination" is recognised (40), while the pluralism embodied by a single congregation is not.

A more subtle idea of congregational culture closer to the one adopted here (which is in terms of Geertz's semiotic approach) is set out in an important article by Martin Marty (1991). The basis of his article is a definition of culture formulated by the anthropologist James Axtell (cited above in Chapter Two, on pages 73-74). Again, Marty emphasises the differences between churches, including cultural differences as seen for example in the New Testament between the earliest Christian communities. But again, no allowance is made for differences that occur within congregations. However, Marty expresses in clear terms some of the reasons for choosing culture, rather than other aspects of congregational life, as a focus for research (15, 17, 18):

It does not take many library forays to realize that many congregational studies or strategy discussions play down this feature. Much of the literature sent from denominational headquarters to congregational leaders gets dropped into the wastebasket because its authors are not alert to the notion of congregations as cultures. They tend to present prefabricated pictures of what the congregation is and to offer prepackaged solutions to its problems. Fortunately, neither the world nor the church is so dull that it can be thus approached...The notion of the congregation as culture can be liberating or limiting, because a congregation's culture both can extend freedom and imprison it. Since culture is a human expression, it usually does both at the same time...Not to know that a congregation is a culture is to be enslaved by idealism and unreality. To believe that a congregation must perpetuate an imprisoning culture is to lose morale, mission and ministry themselves.

The congregation not only has culture, but is a culture. That is why, although churches can be described as communities of worship or of celebration or of faith, and so on, ultimately these are all aspects of congregational culture, and a 'comprehensive' ethnography (which would be impossible) would ideally cover everything in church life. But this is only to say that it can never be complete, only finished, and that ultimately such studies are necessarily based on a selective research focus. The choice of focus contained in this thesis, and its justification, will be turned to in Chapter Four (on pages 163-165 below).

Congregational culture, then, is a matter of the uniqueness or particularity or identity or the collective sense of self of the congregation, not as a uniformly experienced social reality, but one that people relate to differentially, and which is bound up with the process of belonging. In this connection, Cohen writes (1993: 201):

Culture is represented as identity through symbols: simple in form, complex in substance because of their malleability, imprecision, multivocality. One can easily posit the icons of a culture...but what these mean is unspecifiable, because their meanings vary among all those who use them.

Having considered the nature of congregations as social entities which, like other types of organisation, can be interpreted as cultures, the next task is to indicate the ways that the ethnography contained in this thesis is distinct from other examples of congregational studies, and this is discussed now in the second part of the chapter.

II. Interpretative Approaches to Congregations

Culture is not the only framework in which congregational life can be cast, as is evident from the systems metaphor referred to earlier (on page 102 above). This part of the chapter begins with describing some other metaphors and clarifies why they have not been adopted in this research.

A. Images of Congregational Life

Various writers have described congregations in metaphorical terms, and in that respect may be regarded as following the lead of the New Testament which for example depicts the church variously as field (1 Corinthians 3.9), building (1 Peter 2.5), household (Ephesians 2.19), and the body of Christ (Colossians 1.24). This section now considers examples of other images.

1. Narrative

Although narrative is a separate genre from metaphor, in another sense narrative has been used as a metaphor for congregational life. A recent example of this approach to textualising the congregation is in Constructing Your Congregation's Story by James Wind (1993). Adding image upon image, he suggests that the production of congregational story can be compared to reconstructing a body, putting the parts back together and bringing them to life. The skeleton can be conceived in terms of a time line which lists past events in chronological sequence. The major organs of congregational story are the ideas, beliefs, traditions, and values that brought it into being and continued to sustain it. The muscles and flesh are the congregation's main programme of activities over the years, together with its relationships and ways of interacting. Finally, the life that animates the congregation is identified in the ways in which it lives out its faith, thereby conjoining the congregation's story with the Christian story.

Here the metaphor of story or biography is mixed with the metaphor of body. James Hopewell does this too in his emphasis upon narrative, beginning with the assertions that "the congregation's self-perception is primarily narrative in form", that "the congregation's communication among its members is primarily by story", and that "by its own congregating, the congregation participates in narrative structures" (1987: 46). Hopewell employs certain concepts which are central to his approach. The first of these is congregational idiom - the unique local language composed of discourse, behaviours, and objects, by which the people make meaning (5ff). The point of this is that understanding the idiomatic local expression of church life is necessary for the gospel to be proclaimed and heard.

With regard to the centrality of narrative in congregational life, Hopewell differentiates three components in parish story: setting, character and plot. Setting concerns the prevalent world view of the church, a working picture of reality. Character is the style, behaviours and values that form the ethos of the church. Plot is the temporal sequence of events the church retells to confirm its identity. Returning to the connection between narrative and body, the idea of 'character' conveys what Hopewell regards as the almost personal quality of congregations at a corporate level (1987: 103ff). That is, the church's narrative is like the life story of an individual. This leads Hopewell to speak of the 'persona' or 'spirit' or 'genius' of a congregation. On that basis he finds points of comparison between congregational story and classical myths, identifying the 'persona' of the congregation with a mythic character such as Zeus or Daedalus. He then uses mythic story to shed light on the range of choices faced by the congregation, together with possible futures that lie ahead of it and, drawing upon Richard Niebuhr (1951), sets out various possible relationships between congregational story and the Christian story (1987: 172-176). This is a theme that will be returned to in Chapter Eight (on page 290 below).

In the congregation's story, plot tells of changing events and unfolding activities, conveying the local church's experience over time. Plots do four things: they link (concatenating events), unfold (teasing out reasons for what happens), thicken (incorporating complications), and twist (having unexpected reversals). Thus the plot sometimes links Christ and congregational story by "accepting and affirming the story as it stands" (172). In this case "the person of Christ is reflected in and through what occurs" (176). Second, sometimes the plot unfolds by "teasing...the congregational narrative towards the promise of the kingdom" (172). In this case the present nature of a congregational

action, "while acceptable, nevertheless requires development toward a more adequate realization of the kingdom" (176). Third, sometimes the plot thickens by "prophetically contradicting the [congregational] story by disputing its development" (172). In this case a church activity is "dangerously but inextricably caught in evil and endured because even in its situation Christ is witnessed" (176). And last, sometimes the narrative has the effect of "transforming congregational [story] by twisting its plot". In this case the parish activity is twisted in order radically to convert "its nature to conform to the person of Christ" (176).

For all its creative brilliance and elegance, ultimately Hopewell's narrative approach cannot escape its metaphorical quality. Congregational life and congregational culture are not identical to 'story'. This is a point which arose in the previous chapter (on page 94 above) with regard to Mark Hobart's criticism that "culture is not a text" (1985: 35). While the storied aspects of congregational life are a major source of cultural information, Hopewell goes a stage beyond this by basing his entire approach upon literary theory, particularly that of Northrop Frye, who identifies four narrative genres (Hopewell, 58ff): comic (happy ending), romance (adventure), tragedy (fateful ending), and irony (sober acceptance). From these, Hopewell derives corresponding world views by which congregations struggle collectively for meaning: gnostic, charismatic, canonic, and empiric. The problem with this is that, in spite of its creativity, ultimately it does not arise from the empirical setting but is instead imposed upon it, and so at best can only be of speculative value. Lastly, in discussing the 'character', 'persona', 'spirit', or 'genius' of the congregation, Hopewell is again reifying culture. As Cohen puts it: "It is not so much that it does not exist as that it has no ontology: it does not exist apart from what people do" (1993: 207).

An emphasis upon narrativity is also articulated by George Stroup (1981: 91):

Communities, like individuals, have identities and these identities also assume narrative form, narratives which re-present and interpret the community's history and experience.

Stroup (171) refers to the "collision of narratives" when, for example, an outsider encounters the narrative identity of a congregation and has to make the decision whether or not to share in that narrative and so become an insider of the community. Collision of narratives is a form of what Gadamer means by the fusion of horizons (Stroup, 219). When there is a collision between a person's narrative and the Christian story it can lead to transformation (235). The difference between Stroup and Hopewell lies in the relationship between congregational story and the Christian story, since Hopewell recognises that there can be tension between the two. Indeed Hopewell's approach suggests a collision of narratives, not just between the individual and the community, but a collision between the congregation's story and the Christian story. That too is a collision which leads to transformation.

Anthony Thiselton describes the hermeneutics of being drawn into biblical narrative-worlds (1992: 567-570). Firstly, "narratives can catch readers off-guard". Another mechanism is the "possibility of grasping personal identities". A third is that "narrative-worlds...stimulate imagination and exploration of possible worlds". Lastly (569):

They activate the eschatological call of Christian pilgrimage, in the sense of beckoning towards new future action, or in some cases also warning readers of projected possibilities to be avoided. They provide a resource by which readers can transcend the present.

While the idea of congregational narrative can be overstated either by equating culture with narrative or by reifying it, this theme of the relationship between biblical narrative and the Christian identity of the congregation will be taken up in Chapter Eight (page 291).

2. Life Cycle

Another possible metaphor is to take a life cycle approach to congregations, based on Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1980) and drawing the analogy with the individual's eightfold stages of life. The life of a congregation culture, in this view, grows or matures according to stages of development. Progress through the stages depends on the successful completion of the appropriate developmental tasks.

Donald Capps, in applying life cycle theory to the life of congregations, sets out eight characteristics of healthy churches based on Erikson's eight stages, and defined in terms of the way the congregation responds to the psychosocial needs of individuals (1983: 76-79). Accordingly, in the healthy church: the distinctiveness of the individual is valued; there are established procedures for expressing disapproval; the internal plot (in relation to the Christian story) is tested against external realities; members communicate in an open and disciplined way; there is a community of shared experiences and meanings; there is an openness to others and a resistance to withdrawing into itself; there is a caring community; and there is ongoing reflection upon its essence in the light of changing internal and external circumstances.

In a later work, Capps (1990) also uses the individual as a metaphor for congregational culture when he suggests that congregations can have a predilection for making themselves unhappy. He cites Paul Watzlawick (1983) and comments (1990: 4):

Just when a congregation is poised for good things to happen, it backs off, preferring, instead, the familiar company of misery. The bulk of Watzlawick's book is devoted to identifying the methods that individuals employ to make and keep themselves unhappy. In my view, the same methods that individuals use to stay unhappy may also be found in congregational life.

Method one covers four games with the past - glorifying the past, preferring the past, identifying fatal mistakes in the past, and doing what was done in the past when it no longer works. Method two is the illusion of alternatives, presenting a number of options in a given situation when in fact only one of them is open. Method three involves harbouring "the belief that someone or something poses a threat" (14), and then discovering 'evidence' to that effect. Method four involves continuing to do something because no-one knows what would happen if it were stopped. Method five is the self-fulfilling prophecy that creates a situation which did not previously exist but was wrongly said to exist. Method six is when people act in a stubborn way, supposedly out of 'principle' when in fact "they are against everything and for nothing" (20).

Another approach under this heading is contained in The Life Cycle of a Congregation by Martin Saarinen (1986).

Congregational life cycle is to do with stages of growth and decline. The growth phase is from birth to infancy to adolescence to prime. The decline phase is from maturity to aristocracy to bureaucracy to death. Movement from one stage to the next involves a cyclical process of rising and dying, depending on the successful completion of the tasks appropriate to each stage, and always involving current implementing, evaluating, envisioning of the future, and planning for it. Significantly, just as growth can be arrested, so decline can be interrupted by rebirth.

Saarinen identifies four factors which vary in dominance from stage to stage: energy (new life), program (specific activities), administration (setting priorities), and inclusion (establishing relationships). Each stage from growth to decline is characterised by the relative strength of each factor (indicated by use of upper and lower case of the initial for each factor). The dimensions of birth, for example, characterised by heightened energy ('E') with

relatively less developed program ('p'), administration ('a') and inclusion ('i'), are abbreviated to 'Epai'. Accordingly, infancy is associated with 'EpaI', adolescence with 'EPai', and prime with 'EPAI'.

The decline stages leading towards 'death' are those of maturity, aristocracy, bureaucracy. In ways that emerge in the course of the ethnography in Part Two of this thesis, significantly it is these which are most reminiscent of the situation at Riverstane Church. Maturity is 'ePAI': energetic enough, but low on enthusiasm (diminished E), settled in its routines, priding itself in being unchanging and retaining traditional patterns and values (high A), preferring to maintain existing activities (high P), using up most energy in its internal relationships (high I), and giving less attention to acquiring and keeping new members. Aristocracy is 'epAI': an unenergetic, jaded form of busyness (diminished E), with less support for its activities (diminished P), with power jealously guarded while efficient business practice maintains the status quo (high A), and the congregation turning more in on itself as membership and participation levels fall (high I). Bureaucracy is 'epAi': energy outlay is minimal (diminished E), much less attention is given to the work of the congregation (diminished P), all that remains are important structures, rules and policies (high A), while people are defensive, hostile, and communication breaks down (diminished I).

Again, while life cycle theory in the individual is psychoanalytically based, when applied to congregations it becomes at most analogous and ultimately imposes preformulated categories upon the situation rather than deriving them empirically from the particular setting itself. For these reasons, in spite of some continuities with the situation at Riverstane, the life cycle metaphor is not explored further here.

3. Family

The final metaphor for congregational life being outlined here has its basis in family systems theory. The analogy is between congregational dynamics and family dynamics, as set out at length by Edwin Friedman (1988) in his account of the intergenerational processes at work in the family system, and their counterparts in congregational life, including behaviours such as scapegoating, emotional triangles and family secrets. The implication here is that the congregation is more likely to resemble a dysfunctional family than a healthy one.

Victoria Rebeck (1990: 14-16) makes helpful observations in this connection. She cites Anne Schaef and Diane Fassel (1988), who identify addictive organisations as those which encourage repression of feelings through an atmosphere in which people feel it is not safe to be honest, and so learn to live by the three rules of "don't talk, don't think, don't feel" (Rebeck, 14). Consequently the real sources of conflict are rarely on the surface or openly acknowledged. Communication is typically indirect, ineffective, inefficient and insignificant. Other mechanisms include the loss of corporate memory through failure to learn from the past and selective remembering. There is externalisation (working out personal issues on the job) and projection (blaming problems on an outside source). There is dualism (over-emphasis on differences with others) and denial of reality. There is isolation (ignoring outside bodies) and perfectionism (the desire to control, inability to accept failure and the acceptance of impossible goals). There is judgmentalism and avoidance of problems.

A similar perspective is offered by Diana Rivas-Druck (1990), who describes the phenomenon of 'codependency' in congregations. Codependency is the unhealthy dependence which consists in one person's behaviour being harmfully

contorted in response to another person's behavioural disorders, typically an addicted person (20):

Congregational families are affected by the same dysfunctions that affect nuclear families. In fact, many dysfunctional behaviours are mistaken for good Christian values and virtues. For instance, families troubled by addiction or mental illness often have an unwritten rule of denial: don't talk about what you experience; don't even feel it. In the church, avoiding conflict and holding in feelings that may trouble others is justified as "turning the other cheek." In both family and church life, trying to protect people from the consequences of their actions is mistaken for being helpful. The congregation and the pastor often collaborate in role playing, the congregation acting like powerless and helpless children, while the pastor plays parent. The members' strengths and coping abilities, as well as their competence in initiating ministry, are undermined.

While the dynamics of family systems theory as explicated by Friedman, Rebeck, and Rivas-Druck also have some continuity with various aspects of Riverstane culture, the idea of the congregation as family is, in the end, a metaphor, and again for that reason is not explored further here.

In the final analysis, the idea of congregational culture is fundamentally distinct from the various approaches outlined above in that, importantly, 'culture' is not a metaphor. While granting that the concept of 'webs of significance', as invoked by Clifford Geertz, is itself metaphorical, what it refers to is the symbolic construction of community, which is not a metaphor but rather a social process. Accordingly, it is not being claimed that congregations are like cultures, but rather that they are cultures. In that respect, the approach taken in this thesis is distinct from those described above.

Having considered alternative ways of viewing congregational life, the next section of the chapter now turns to some examples of empirical studies of congregations.

B. Congregational Studies

Since the early 1980s there has been a marked increase in publications under the category of congregational studies. While the subject of congregational life has a much longer history as a body of literature, the recently emerging field of congregational studies is distinguished by a more interdisciplinary approach. It is also a mostly American field and, so far as published work is concerned, relates mostly to American churches, though with some notable exceptions. This section of the chapter will consider selected key texts and contrast them with the approach taken in this research.

1. Tom Allan

In 1954, one notable precursor to the present field of congregational studies was the account by Tom Allan of a local church setting in The Face of My Parish. Although not at all used as a source for the ideas contained in this research, it is nevertheless a study which has considerable relevance here, not only because it is about a Scottish congregation located in a large city, but also because of some of its key insights. It is an account of a parish mission and its effects over a period of about five years, including visitation programmes undertaken by members of the congregation. Allan goes on to reflect upon the issues raised by the experience, interacting with other literature, and presenting in the light of these his proposals for congregational mission and ministry. In some respects that is also partly what this thesis attempts, although with regard to different circumstances, focus, and method.

More particularly, Allan describes what he calls "the problem of assimilation" of new members in the congregation (1984: 33) and, as will be seen in Parts Two and Three of the thesis, this is indeed germane to the situation at

Riverstane Church. Allan found that getting people to join the church in the first place was a relatively straightforward exercise, but maintaining their involvement beyond the short term after becoming members proved to be "virtually impossible". He suggests that one reason for this is "that a great number of newcomers are simply chilled out by the attitude of the old members" (34). A second is the inadequacy of church activities (35). However, the third and main reason he associates with the failure to assimilate new members is the "cleavage which exists between the church and the world from which these people have come" (37).

Significantly, Allan uses the word "culture" to refer to this third aspect of the congregation's life which, in his terms, chills people out. Although he regards the problem to be the "secular" nature of congregational culture, which is "diametrically opposed" to the secular culture of new members, it can be seen that all three of the above problem areas which he identifies are in fact aspects of culture. That is, the non-assimilation of outsiders can be accounted for entirely in terms of congregational culture. By "secular", Allan refers to the conflict between Christian values and congregational culture. A similar situation (although in different respects) is discussed in Part Three of this thesis in relation to congregational culture at Riverstane Church.

The main difference here relates to the emphasis upon an ethnographic approach. However, it can be said that there are important ways in which Allan anticipates the content of this research, although not in the sense of being a source. His identification of congregational culture, its distance in certain respects from Christian ideals, and the related theme of non-assimilation of outsiders are key areas which are taken up in Parts Two and Three of this thesis.

2. Carl Dudley et al

Building Effective Ministry (ed. Dudley, 1983) is a study of Wiltshire Church from the perspectives of psychology, ethnography, literary symbolism, sociology, and theology, and presents a deeply human account of the life of that congregation. However, as an early attempt at an interdisciplinary approach it is beset with the difficulty of harmonising accounts from a variety of disciplines, which are written by different specialists, and presented in separate chapters. This seems to suggest that each chapter is a snapshot taken from a different angle which, when pieced together, provides a composite picture of the whole.

The problem with this is that, in the terms set out in Chapter One of this thesis (on page 31ff), from a hermeneutical point of view none of the various accounts could be as objective or value-neutral as such a composite approach implies. This is also implied in the use of the general heading, 'The Application of Theory', as if the various theories included have a detached objectivity. While lack of objectivity is itself unavoidable, it then becomes necessary to give an account of the various horizons which are involved and to consider how these might shape the interpretations. However, while explicit attention is drawn to this in one of the later, non-empirical chapters, it is not in fact a feature of the main body of work. Of the various contributors, Lyle Schaller is the first to acknowledge the role of the researcher's horizon in the interpretation of congregational culture (1983: 160):

The assumptions, beliefs, prejudices, value system, understanding of contemporary reality, academic preparation, theological stance, age, biases, life experiences, denominational background, and other baggage carried by the consultant constitute the most important single dynamic or variable in determining what happens in a parish consultation. The concept of a "neutral" or "objective" approach to parish consultation, therefore, ranks somewhere between an illusion and a deception.

Further, the interplay between the horizons of the researchers and of the congregation is also not presented, since the voices of congregants do not appear in the text directly, but only the voices of the writers. And, given the interpreted quality of the various accounts, it then follows that they would not necessarily all fit together in a complementary manner. This would then require some further critical reflection in order to moderate between the conflict of interpretations.

As a final remark, the ethnographic chapter of the work describes in some detail the research process followed and is generally similar to the approach taken in this thesis. Then some ethnographic conclusions are presented, but these are stated rather than developed. On this point, with regard to the ethnography presented here, Part Two of this thesis explicitly sets out the steps leading to the ethnographic conclusions which are taken up in Part Three, and includes the voices of congregants by incorporating within the text ample extracts from ethnographic interviews.

3. James Hopewell

Although Hopewell's over-reliance upon literary theory to impose structures upon congregational culture was noted previously, the early part of Congregation: Stories and Structures (1987: 19ff) is a helpful introduction to the basic types of congregational studies which have appeared in the literature. He distinguishes between contextual, mechanical, organic, and symbolic studies. Contextual studies focus on the external aspects of congregational life in its relation to the community and wider society. Mechanical studies concentrate on congregational activities, priorities, and effectiveness in what they do. Organic studies are concerned with the communal development, interaction, and participation of congregations. Lastly, symbolic studies are centred on the construction of

congregational identity around its symbol system, and it is with this type of study that Hopewell's work is primarily concerned. These four categories identified by Hopewell in fact are used to form the basis of the Handbook for Congregational Studies (Carroll et al, 1986), in which they are renamed as the following dimensions of congregational life: context (relating to local and global social systems), program (the mechanical 'what' of daily routine in congregational life), process (the organic 'how' of interpersonal relationships), and identity (the symbolic expression of belonging in the congregation).

In one sense, the approach taken in this thesis is most relevant to that of symbolic studies, or the identity dimension of congregational life. Yet given that ethnography is concerned with what people say and do as sources of cultural information, clearly matters of context, program, and process are also germane to this research. In the volume by Carroll et al, while these four different sections represent different foci, it is possible to concentrate on one while being informed by the others, though not necessarily following them in detail. In the context of this research, which centres on the identity dimension, the other three dimensions as developed in Carroll et al offer helpful insights but play no greater part here. However, since the section on identity by James Hopewell takes an approach based upon literary theory, in spite of its ingenuity (for reasons discussed above) it is not of particular relevance to this research. Rather, a more thoroughly ethnographic approach as set out in the terms described in Chapter Two is adopted in the chapters ahead.

4. Don Browning

In A Fundamental Practical Theology (1991), Don Browning focuses on congregational studies as part of his larger

project regarding the organisation of theology as a whole. While his proposals for restructuring theological studies are not the subject of this discussion, it is useful to consider here his approach to studying congregations. Browning was part of the team of researchers in the study edited by Dudley (1983), and in this later work he takes up again the situation at Wiltshire Church, a "liberal, upper-middle-class Methodist church in an exclusive, suburban New England Village" (1991: 16). In conjunction with this are studies of two other congregations: the Church of the Covenant, a "conservative, middle-class Presbyterian church in a county seat in Ohio" (16), and the Apostolic Church of God, an "African American Pentecostal church on the South Side of Chicago" (12).

Browning's focus in each of the congregations is the way in which they exercise phronesis, or practical moral reason, as part of their congregational mission (9-10). His choice of focus is based upon Gadamer's view that phronesis has an essentially hermeneutical character (Gadamer, 1991: 324), so that to study congregational phronesis is to focus on the congregation's own interpretations. Browning paraphrases this as "the use of reason to answer the questions, 'What should we do?' and 'How should we live?'" (10). Such practical reason engages both general tradition (which is in the form of religious narratives, metaphors, symbols, and classic texts) and specific values and principles, and these are interpreted and reinterpreted according to the demands of the present situation. In their phronesis, congregations are both communities of memory (embodying tradition) and communities of hope (in their orientation to the future through practical reason).

In studying these congregations, Browning distinguishes between five interrelated categories which arise from the questions "we invariably ask ourselves, whether consciously or unconsciously, when circumstances force a moral issue

upon us" (1983: 53). The five categories relate to metaphysical questions, ethical questions, questions about human needs, social questions, and praxis questions (1991: 71). He developed this typology by modifying Talcott Parson's analysis of social action in terms of personality, social system, and culture (110). In place of culture, Browning differentiates the metaphysical and the ethical dimension, and completes his typology with the addition of concrete practice. He refers to these various levels of practical moral thinking as the visional, obligational, tendency-need, environmental-social and rule-role dimensions, and they fit together as follows (111):

Action is (1) made up of concrete practices (rules, roles, communication patterns); (2) motivated by needs and tendencies; (3) limited and channeled by social-systemic and ecological constraints; (4) further ordered by principles of obligation; and (5) given meaning by visions, narratives, and metaphors.

To provide what Browning refers to as 'thick' descriptions, these dimensions draw upon theories from the human sciences.

While it is a highly important and illuminative work, Browning's approach to congregational studies is not followed here. Although he insightfully makes phronesis in congregations the focus of research (1991), it is only possible because the churches in question are already involved in programmes which directly exhibit practical reason. However, at Riverstane Church, as will be seen there is a marked absence of any shared phronesis by which congregants might engage together in practical moral reflection upon their work and witness together as a local Christian church. In other respects, though, Browning's analysis is indeed relevant, for example his discussion on the practice of extending care towards strangers, based on Christian tradition and on the ethics of mutuality and equal regard. Although not in the sense of being a source, this resonates with the interpretation of the situation at Riverstane Church as developed below in Chapters Eight and Nine of the thesis. In the context of Browning's work, one

of the situations described concerns the church's provision of sanctuary for refugees as illegal immigrants, while in this research the situation is that of churches receiving the 'stranger within their gates'.

Also relevant to this research is Browning's approach of drawing upon the human sciences for the interpretation of congregational life, in particular in the use of the social anthropological method of ethnography. However, one of the difficulties of Browning's work is that it is not ethnographic enough. His focus upon the practical reason of congregations, while of itself worthwhile, is nevertheless imposed upon the situations in advance rather than being derived from them. For this reason, his fivefold moral framework is not used here in relation to Riverstane Church. As Elaine Graham comments in this connection (1996: 91-92):

There is little attention to the internal power relations of the congregations, nor any commitment towards looking at exclusions of gender, race or class within them...Browning might have come to very different conclusions if he had started with...their self-professed practice and ministry.

It might also be added that if the focus is, for example, that of discerning the wisdom of the congregation then, rather than the wisdom associated with phronesis (an Aristotelian category), the biblical wisdom of sophia could equally have been selected.

Another difference between Browning's approach and the one taken in this thesis relates to the idea of 'thick description'. As Geertz writes (1973: 14):

Culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly - that is, thickly - described.

What Browning refers to as 'thick description' (1991: 16-17) relates to the five dimensions he identifies and the use of explanatory theories from the human sciences which come under these headings. In contrast to this, Geertz refers to

examining in detail the concrete social processes of a community and the operation of its symbol system, which is the approach taken here.

A final difference between Browning's approach and this thesis is that he enlists the study of the three congregations, not as projects in their own right, but to the wider purpose of illustrating his own method and his proposed restructuring of the theological encyclopaedia.

5. Mary Elizabeth Moore and Peter Stromberg

These last two approaches to congregational research described here are distinct from the preceding ones in that they are closer to the approach taken here, and so will be considered together.

At the time of writing, the work of Mary Elizabeth Moore in this connection has yet to appear formally in the literature, but its importance is such that it would be remiss not to include some reference here. The source of what follows is her presentation of work in progress at a departmental research seminar in New College, University of Edinburgh, on 20 January 1994, under the title of "Religious Communities as Sources of Wisdom: Ethogenic Method and Practical Theology in Two Religious Communities in California".

The two communities in question are a Native American Protestant community and a Protestant town church. The term 'ethogenic' refers to a social research method associated with Rom Harre which takes a naturalistic and ecological approach to explain the origin of particular human behaviour and the dynamics of social interaction. Moore combines this with participant observation of the social interaction taking place at all levels, such as with the environment, the holy, and the community, and involving the use of

questionnaires, informal conversation, and interviews. She highlights particular features of the research method she employs: the centrality of narrative to the process (allowing the community to be the storyteller), its intersubjective nature, its flexible and open-ended design, its unobtrusive quality, and its self-reflexivity (making explicit the horizon of the researcher).

There is continuity with the approach taken here regarding most of these latter features, except that Moore's approach is centred on composing a unifying narrative of the community, weaving all the different stories people tell into a single story incorporating every major theme and many of the minor themes. While the usefulness of narrative as a source of cultural information has already been noted above, it was added that culture is not interchangeable with story, so that it is possible to overstate the place of narrative in the interpretative process. More significantly, unlike Moore's approach the concern here is not to produce naturalistic explanations of the way people behave, or to look for patterns, or to generate theory. Rather, the approach of this research is to interpret differences within congregational culture, as opposed to consensual patterns, and to reflect upon it within its own terms instead of forming generalisations in the process of theory-building.

The final example of congregational research which is being featured in this chapter is also the one which is closest to the approach taken here, and indeed will be referred to in some more detail in future chapters. Peter Stromberg's account of congregational culture at Immanuelskyrkan in Stockholm, Symbols of Community: The Cultural System of a Swedish Church (1986), is one of the few thoroughly ethnographic studies in the literature, and goes beyond the search for patterns or consensus to examine differences in the way congregants relate to the shared symbol system around which they gather. Stromberg refers to congregations

as an example of a "commitment system", which is a type of "cultural system whose adherents in some sense have chosen to accept that system" (4).

The approach taken in this thesis is similar to Stromberg's insofar as it seeks to give some account of the ordinary and unproblematic differences or dissensus, as opposed to consensus, which pertains to culture. However, Stromberg's focus is upon the belief system of congregants, and he demonstrates the diversity of ways in which people interpret elements of their creed, while in contrast the focus of this research is on the ways congregants relate to symbols of tradition and status (what people say), as well as on the social processes of the congregation (what people do).

Conclusion

Congregations are social entities and can be regarded not only as having cultures but also as being cultures. Indeed, they cannot be adequately understood without taking congregational culture into account, which has implications for practical theological reflection, and that is the impetus for this research.

This concluding chapter of Part One has considered the idea of congregational culture, and contrasted it with ideas of culture which appear in organisation theory. It also considered various images which have been applied to congregations, and these differ from the concept of culture because of their metaphorical nature. Finally the chapter contrasted other ethnographic approaches in congregational studies with the approach taken in this research. The next chapter opens Part Two of the thesis, which is the ethnographic component, and sets out in detail the procedure that was followed in the field setting at Riverstane Church.

PART TWO

An Ethnography of Riverstane Church

CHAPTER FOUR

Ethnographic Fieldwork

Introduction

Part One of this thesis located congregational studies as an example of the theological interpretation of situations and so of hermeneutical Practical Theology. It further specified congregational culture as a coherent and relevant focus for theological reflection. Most examples in the literature have a lack of clarity regarding the concept of congregational culture and the technicalities of empirical method. Perhaps for this reason, structures of congregational life are usually set in advance rather than being allowed to arise from the particularity of the situation itself, so that there is a need for such studies to be more thoroughly ethnographic by having a more rigorous awareness of the method and avoiding the imposition of preformulated categories. Accordingly, for the purposes of this thesis it was considered appropriate and necessary in the second chapter to explicate in some detail the nature of ethnography as a hermeneutically conceived method for studying culture in communities.

Now in Part Two the discussion turns to the empirical component of this thesis which is concerned with interpreting congregational culture at Riverstane Church. This chapter presents an account of the approach to fieldwork and research strategy. Its purpose is to be self-reflexive with regard to the horizon of the researcher, the research decisions made, practicalities in the field setting, and the consequences of these for the interpretation presented in subsequent chapters.

The chapter is arranged in three parts. The first part describes aspects of the researcher's horizon which are relevant to the study and have a bearing upon the participant observation within the field setting. It also describes the circumstances surrounding the origination of the field study at Riverstane Church. The second part is concerned with research strategy, and deals with the approach to ethnographic interviews. The final part discusses the process of analysing ethnographic material and the production of the account presented in subsequent chapters.

I. The Researcher

It was noted in each of the chapters of Part One that the horizon of the observer has an active role in constructing an interpretation. There is no Archimedean point of objectivity, or view from nowhere, and it is not possible to interpret in the first place without a position from which to begin. Interpretation is the interplay or fusion of the horizon of the interpreter and that of the hermeneutical object, whether it be a text, or a non-textual life-expression such as an objet d'art (Dilthey), or meaningful human action (Ricoeur), or (as in the case of this research) congregational culture. Accordingly, it is not only appropriate but also necessary here to render explicit the relevant features of the horizon which the researcher as a preconstructed individual brings to the situation.

Instead of general autobiographical notes, which would be of doubtful value, rather it is areas of effective personal history specifically engaged while interacting with the hermeneutical object which are more salient in their consequences for interpretation. Given that this study is concerned with a congregation, relevant features of the researcher's ecclesiological horizon will be considered.

A. Ecclesiological and Theological Horizon

As will be seen in the chapters that follow, one of the culturally important features of congregational life at Riverstane Church is that of relationships with outsiders. This is a feature which emerged only gradually from the research through ethnographic interviews and participant observation. In fact it was an entirely unanticipated area of significance at Riverstane and only became clear at a relatively late stage in the research. It also has some points of contact with the effective history of the researcher which are worth considering here.

Although a member of the Church of Scotland since 1977, I was not brought up in a church environment. While having nominal Protestant affiliation through the traditional west of Scotland differentiation with Roman Catholics, there was in effect no direct form of religious background in my family of origin. That is not to say religion was completely absent from what Gadamer refers to as our effective history (1991: 300): "We are always already affected by history...historical consciousness is itself situated in the web of historical effects." In that sense the church was always there in my environment, its local effects played at least an indirect part in my background, and to that extent Christian tradition had already shaped elements of my experience before 1977.

However, it was as a relative stranger to the church that I first joined a local congregation, and something of that 'outsider' perspective has remained with me since. My church experiences as a child came out of the Sunday school attendance which was a requirement of being a member of the Boys' Brigade, from roughly the ages of eight to eleven, which by definition was based at the local Church of Scotland parish church. After that I had virtually no church contact until Youth Fellowship at the age of sixteen.

Many, perhaps most of us who went to the youth group did not come from church backgrounds, and it was only through the network of school acquaintances that we made the existing structure of the Youth Fellowship the meeting place of our choice.

As a result, having grown up outwith church circles throughout childhood until early adulthood, the horizon which I came to form in relation to the church was essentially that of a newcomer, and even as an insider my perspective was one of a relative outsider. This has a direct bearing upon this research in a number of ways. Not having been enculturated in the church world from an early age, there is inevitably an element of the foreign in my experience of congregations in general, regardless of how familiar they may be as social entities in specific cases. Consequently, my orientation towards Riverstane Church (for example) was probably predisposed to be that of a friendly but distinct outsider. This is not in itself problematic since by definition there are no circumstances whereby a new attender in a congregation can become a cultural insider immediately upon arrival. Accordingly, notwithstanding the warm relationships enjoyed with congregants, my position was always one of being distinct from their culture, which is to say that I did not 'go native', and indeed the question of my becoming a member at Riverstane did not arise at any point throughout the five years I worked there.

Another way in which this aspect of my horizon affects the interpretation of Riverstane culture lies in the relationship between congregants and outsiders in general, in that by definition I was more in a position to intuit the perspectives of outsiders in the situation. Again, however, it is important to note that the subject of relationships with outsiders first emerged from what congregants said during interviews, which in turn guided subsequent participant observation, so that it was the insiders

themselves who introduced the theme. A final point in this connection goes back to my experiences of the church world in general as a new and unenculturated member of a local congregation. Although it diminishes over time there is still a strangeness (not in a pejorative sense) in what is now familiar, and while it was not part of the motivation for this research into congregational culture, neither is it an irrelevant factor.

One consequence of my ecclesiological horizon as a relative outsider to the church world is that I am generally disinterested in matters of alignment or disalignment with regard to internal denominational parties, agendas, or interest groups. As a result I have no particular agenda of my own in these areas, so that there is little concern here with ecclesiastical partitions or contradistinctions based on history, ideology, or precommitments. However, ecclesiological aspects of my horizon have been shaped as much by actual experience of churches as by theological reflection. For example, my introduction to the church world was by default through the local parish church, and I first attended Sunday morning services there for fairly arbitrary reasons. It did not occur to me to visit any church other than the local village parish church. In fact I had no idea there was any differentiation among the Protestant churches in Scotland. So far as I knew from my relatively unchurched position at the time, all Protestants were much the same.

While the sense of relative strangeness referred to above concerns congregational cultures at a general level, the foreignness of the local church where I first became a member was of a particular kind. It happened that a new minister had recently arrived to take up post at the local parish church. He himself used the term 'conservative evangelical' to describe his approach, a tradition which I had not previously met or heard of before. People in the

congregation reacted to the minister's outlook in various ways, favourably and unfavourably. Some regarded it as being rather American in style and likened it to that of Billy Graham, a reference which for me had no meaning at the time. Others compared it alternatively to that of Norman Vincent Peale, which was also an unfamiliar reference. But for someone who had not encountered this before, it was a distinctive approach, particularly with regard to the 'conviction' preaching, which was enthusiastic, sincere, somewhat rhetorical and possibly manipulative in force, primarily Bible-based and Christological, with clear emphasis upon themes such as the gospel, the cross, sin, repentance, faith, forgiveness, and salvation, combined with a strong personal call to conversion.

For a period of about ten years afterwards, my trajectory through this and other similar church groups elsewhere was to probe what I discovered to be fundamentalist culture. The conclusion which I reached is congruent to the following statement by James Barr (1984: vii):

For good or ill, it is a fact that many of those who enter into the active life of Christian faith enter it through the gateway of fundamentalism. But it is equally true that many of those who do so come to feel after some time that it is a deeply inadequate form of the Christian religion.

The significance of this with regard to congregational culture at Riverstane Church is that my ecclesiological horizon, from a position of having rejected fundamentalist culture, is disposed towards values of diversity, rational debate, inclusivity, and non-authoritarian leadership. Their opposites, however, while conventionally associated with fundamentalist culture, are not in fact restricted to such churches. In particular, even though there are no traces of Christian fundamentalism at Riverstane Church, as will be seen it nevertheless has characteristics of conformity, uncritical acceptance, exclusivity, and authoritarianism, albeit in different respects from fundamentalist churches. However, while I am inevitably in

tension with these aspects of Riverstane culture, it is an important feature of the interview method (described below) that in these matters the focus is upon the perspectives of congregants.

Another consequence of my ecclesiological horizon is that, in terms of churchmanship, I am also outwith the liturgical tradition represented at Riverstane Church. The preferred term used by a few congregants who have liturgical interests to describe the worship and ethos there is 'Scoto-Catholicism' (a term attributed to W P Paterson in a 1922 reference, from The Church Service Society Record vol.29, 1995, 43). Liturgically this is a relatively 'high' tradition distinct from that of 'High Presbyterianism', with some quasi-Anglican undertones, yet existing within the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland.

Lastly, my theological horizon is one of critical scholarship which seeks to clarify the effective history and traditions that are operative in a given context. In this connection F F Bruce (1970: 15) tells an anecdote from his experiences as a university teacher. On a particular occasion when he was speaking to divinity students on the subject of the principles and methods of biblical criticism, one person responded that although the reasoning involved was logical enough, acceptance of it would be "letting down the side." With regard to my own horizon, letting the side down would be to take a precritical or uncritical theological approach. However, this is not the same as a hypercritical approach so long as there is the postcritical moment which Paul Ricoeur refers to as "second naïveté" (1969: 351). In keeping with this has been the hermeneutical self-criticism presented here as a preface to the interpretation of congregational culture at Riverstane contained in the chapters ahead.

Having given some account of my effective history as it relates to this research, the next section describes my presence in the field setting and the origination of the empirical study.

B. Entrée to the Field Setting

In the ordering of the chapters in this thesis (determined by the logic of setting out theoretical background, discussion of literature, and approach to fieldwork), the presentation of detailed material on Riverstane Church begins at the midpoint of the work as a whole. In fact this is roughly in keeping with the corresponding stage of research while it was in progress, since I was present in the field setting for almost two years before the empirical work began. Danny Jorgensen comments that the selection of a site for research "sometimes is based on opportunity and convenience...[and] the researcher already may be a participant before deciding formally to conduct research in the setting" (1989: 41). A common feature of many ethnographic studies is this 'opportunistic' quality in their origination.

That is indeed how this study began, as I was already a participant in the setting before the research topic was finalised. Moreover, the circumstances were opportunistic on two counts. I was employed there for over five years in total, but at the time of taking up the post it was without any notion of it becoming a possible site for empirical research. Also, the way in which I came to be employed there at all was itself fairly arbitrary. Having been working full-time in another church as a pastoral assistant on a fixed-term contract for twelve months, and with no immediate position of employment to follow, the priority was to find another post with effect from the summer prior to beginning my part-time research in the autumn. In the

event, a telephone call requesting me to do pulpit supply became, rather suddenly, an offer of employment as a pastoral assistant at Riverstane. After some consideration there seemed good reason to explore it further.

That was how I gained entrée to the setting, but it was as much as eighteen months later that the notion of making Riverstane Church the field setting for my empirical research first arose. By that time my presence there was well established, strong relationships were already being built up with church members, and the university had approved my proposal to conduct ethnographic research in the context of a local congregation. Given that I was already conveniently in place within such a setting, it was then pragmatic to enquire into the possibility of making Riverstane the location for the field study.

It is important to note that at the time there was no preconceived idea of what the content of this research might be, beyond the basic research question concerning the nature of congregational culture and how congregants experience it. Ideas such as symbolic boundaries, micro-politics, and the status economy of the congregation were only to emerge much later through ethnographic interviews and participant observation. At the beginning it remained to be seen not only what the research could learn from the congregation, but also whether or not it would be possible to do it at all. Although I already had access to the setting through my employment there, it did not necessarily follow that I would gain access to do the ethnographic research which, although it can sometimes be done covertly, in this case I decided would be conducted with an overt strategy.

There then followed a period of six months in which I cautiously negotiated with the minister and kirk session my entrée to the setting as an ethnographer. One reason for the length of time it took to achieve this is the relative

infrequency of kirk session meetings at Riverstane, which in some churches are held monthly but in this instance there was an interval of three and a half months between consecutive meetings. However it was also necessary to proceed with some care in the interests of successfully gaining proper legitimisation for the research among those who are in authority in the setting.

The negotiation process began with an informal discussion with the minister in which I first introduced the question of doing research in the congregation, and this was met with a response which was somewhat guarded but willing to give the matter consideration. In the weeks and months that followed I communicated details of my proposed research to the minister in writing, explaining exactly what I intended to do, the research questions being asked, what would be observed, and in general terms what kind of results might come out of the study. There were further meetings with the minister in which questions and concerns about the research were dealt with and comments received. Finally the matter was brought before the kirk session at a meeting where I presented a report which formally requested their permission to proceed with the research, and this was granted without reservation.

C. Participant Roles

As a pastoral assistant my responsibilities at Riverstane were participation in Sunday morning and evening services, preaching on average one Sunday in two, leading midday prayer services once or twice a week, home and hospital visiting, conducting funerals, attendance at kirk session and other meetings, speaking at various gatherings, holding classes for first communicants, as well as being present at the range of social activities arising out of the particularity of congregational life. In all these areas I

took every opportunity to interact informally with as many church members as possible through ordinary conversation. Before and after Sunday services, for example, I made it a priority to allocate time to speak with people seated along pews or making their way in and out the building. But as well as these official church duties, there were many informal social occasions from taking afternoon tea to being at parties in which relationships with congregants were built up.

1. Advantages and Disadvantages of Pastoral Roles

My role as a pastoral assistant in the congregation had the effect of assisting my role as researcher to the extent that relationships involving acceptance, rapport, friendship and trust arose in a natural way due to the nature of the job. The pastoral role gained me access to the general life of the congregation at a public level and, since people's homes were open to me as a matter of course, also at a private level. This meant I had an established position at Riverstane in which congregants were comfortable with my presence both as a listener and as someone asking them about their experiences. As a result I was allowed to hear the deeply held attitudes, opinions, feelings and perceptions of many people in an atmosphere of confidentiality.

The benefit of this from the point of view of conducting ethnographic interviews is clear, but it is also the case that for the congregants being interviewed there was a markedly cathartic effect. As a phenomenon, this has been described in connection with the famous human relations study of the Hawthorne industrial plant in Chicago, in Management and the Worker by William Dickson and Fritz J Roethlisberger (Harvard University Press, 1939). Helen Schwartzman refers to the positive effect in the Hawthorne research of "just attempting to listen sympathetically to workers, as well as the status and attention associated with

being studied" (1993: 7). In particular, "the non-directive interview style that was developed had a very cathartic effect on workers" (8). The therapeutic quality of this was recognised at the time (13):

The Hawthorne researchers appeared to have been most impressed by the non-directive interview approach and they concluded that the installation of such a program on a permanent basis would be of major therapeutic value.

Similarly, interviewees at Riverstane reported with enthusiasm their enjoyment of being listened to at such a detailed level, and indeed typically wished to continue the process beyond my own requirements. This therapeutic dimension of ethnographic interviewing has important implications that will be returned to shortly.

However, there were also limitations resulting from my pastoral role. One of these was the element of being not quite an ordinary congregant, which entailed a degree of separation from the interviewees, and thereby had a bearing upon the level of disclosure on their part. Although as a matter of course people tended to talk much more freely with me than they would with the minister, nevertheless my pastoral function, my association with clerical clothes, and my participation in church services had the inevitable effect of introducing a symbolic difference which could never be entirely suspended. It was possible to compensate partially for this through an 'off-duty' approach to the interviews, in explaining that I was not there in a pastoral capacity, and also in wearing ordinary clothes. But ultimately, as well as knowing that I was privy to a great deal of cultural information at a subtle level, I could also be sure there would be some matters which I never heard about. On this general point, the possibility for ethnographic research to be conducted by the actual minister of a congregation would then seem to be ruled out.

2. Role Conflict

A further difficulty was the problem of achieving a balance between pastoral and researcher roles. Before the study formally began, my work there was effectively as a complete participant rather than observer. Even during the period of negotiating entrée as a researcher, as a matter of course I did not actively engage in ethnographic observation beyond a normal awareness of what was taking place in the setting. Following that, I entered the stage of what Jorgensen (1989: 55) refers to as observer-as-participant (more participant than observer). This was appropriate at the beginning of the research, but over time it became necessary for the proportion of observation to be increased. However, in a situation of paid employment, often the most that can be achieved is to be as much observer as participant. For this reason there was only a limited extent to which it was possible to be participant-as-observer (more observer than participant).

As well as responsibility to the employer, another reason why the researcher role can be eclipsed by the pastoral role is the expectation of church members. It was mentioned above that symbolic cues can generate distance, so that I made a point of wearing ordinary clothes at ethnographic interviews as a strategy to signal that I was not present in a pastoral role. In general this was effective, but beyond the symbolic level there was also the fact that having access to congregants at all was predicated in the first place upon my participant roles in the field setting so that there were a small number of occasions when the researcher role in interviews had to be abandoned on account of pastoral expectations.

This relates to the matter of research ethics in the field setting. In one sense the researcher is obliged not to interfere in the setting, such as in actively bringing about

a situation, or in directing what people do, or deliberately trying to influence outcomes. As well as the ethical implications, it also increases the problem of researcher bias. However, there can be occasions where participant roles make some degree of involvement unavoidable or obligatory. This is particularly so in the case of pastoral roles, which by definition entail elements of intervention in a given context, or encouraging people in particular actions, or guiding certain eventualities. As a result there can be dilemmas for the pastor as researcher, in which a choice has to be made between either the researcher role or the pastoral role, with the one being at the expense of the other. Part of the demanding nature of ethnographic research is in dealing with such a conflict over an extended period, and Jorgensen comments that this can tax the researcher's "abilities and resources beyond reasonable limits" (1989: 41).

3. Role Contamination

If there are limitations with regard to the pastor as researcher, then so also with the researcher as pastor. The above possibility of pastoral expectations undermining the researcher role illustrates the further phenomenon of role contamination, which has consequences for the type of material arising in ethnographic interviews. It was already noted in connection with the Hawthorne studies that there can be a therapeutic quality to ethnographic research in general. However, this can have a bearing upon the content of interviews. If congregants experience a form of catharsis in the process, then it might have the effect of shaping the selection of material which they bring to it. For example, if interviewees have a sense of relief in unburdening themselves of those things which trouble them about congregational life, then they might tend to focus on these rather than other equally relevant matters. It is also possible that with the researcher having the

participant role of an assistant in the field setting (with its associations of being at a relatively unimportant grade), congregants are more likely to voice their complaints about things in the knowledge that it is safe to do so.

On this point, the conjunction of participant observation with ethnographic interviews becomes especially important. Attention to what people do as well as what they say makes it less likely for significant omissions in the interview material to be overlooked. It also has implications for the design of interviews, which is the topic of the next part of the chapter. But it is important to note here that the therapeutic effect does not invalidate the material which arises in interviews, which remains true even if it is selective, and indeed it could not be other than selective. This is to say that while ethnographic conclusions can be defended rationally, they are always tentative and incomplete (a point raised earlier on pages 91 and 108 above). What matters is that the selection is primarily that of the interviewees, and that the role of the researcher in shaping their selection is minimised. Ultimately, though, such role contamination cannot be entirely obviated, and this is not particular to pastoral roles as it is a more general phenomenon of interpretative ethnography that the 'hermeneut' is also partly a 'therapeut'. Indeed, this could perhaps add to the rationale for choosing an ethnographic rather than an alternative approach to congregational research.

II. Research Strategy

In Chapter Two, ethnography was introduced in general terms as an appropriate qualitative method for the interpretation of culture, highlighting the use of both participant observation and ethnographic interviews. The second part of

this chapter now describes in more specific terms the relation between the two with reference to the study of congregational culture at Riverstane Church. Having discussed participant roles above, an account is given here of the approach taken to ethnographic interviews in the field setting, including matters of validity and bias.

A. Preparation in the Field Setting

James Spradley makes the comment that "skilled ethnographers often gather most of their data through participant observation and many casual, friendly conversations" (1979: 58) and that "months may pass before systematic interviews with informants occur" (69). It is important in approaching the fieldwork that such interviews should not be undertaken at too early a stage, since the effort involved can be wasted by a lack of cultural insight resulting from an insufficient amount of prior participant observation. The initial period of observation should be long enough to give the ethnographer an adequate grasp of the setting so that the interviews which follow can be more effective. Accordingly, ethnographic interviews at Riverstane Church began after twelve months of what was described above as being an observer-as-participant.

This period was partly a matter of the ethnographer as a beginner proceeding with caution, given that poorly conducted interviews generate poor material and that it is quite easy to do bad ethnography. It was also a period of preparation with regard to reading and training, through attendance at the University of Edinburgh Graduate School in Social Sciences, where I took the course in Qualitative Methods and Ethnographic Fieldwork taught by Professor Anthony Cohen (Department of Social Anthropology).

Moreover, the twelve-month period was importantly an opportunity to learn from early fieldwork mistakes and the limits imposed by the field setting itself upon research strategy. Jorgensen (1989: 32) explains that ethnographic research strategy is an ongoing "process of identifying, clarifying, negotiating, refining, and elaborating precisely what will be studied". Commenting on this cycle of observation, analysis, redefinition, and observation, he adds (30-31):

When going into the field with an idea about what is problematic, it is important to remain open to the widest possible range of findings, including the possibility that your initial idea is inappropriate or completely mistaken...(it just does not make sense in terms of the realities of everyday life), or that many important issues in need of study were not anticipated at the outset.

A clear example of this at Riverstane was the original design of research prior to beginning the fieldwork, which for reasons that will become clear could not be implemented. It was planned to invite congregants to a series of parallel group meetings in the church hall where they would be asked to take part in various activities and discussions with a view to generating cultural information. It was envisaged that in these meetings each group would produce a time chart telling the story of the congregation as far back as the people in the group have been involved, up to about 30 years ago, with the 'homework' being to think about what details the time charts should contain. To help in this, old copies of the church magazine over that period were available together with various other items of ephemera. There were videos of important church events in more recent years, as well as sets of projection slides, and also an old recording on 78 rpm discs of a church service which was broadcast from Riverstane on BBC radio at the time of the Second World War. Congregants would be asked to discuss, and then to summarise using a single word, the most significant features of church life which appear on the time chart. In the light of these themes, use of the Bible was also intended in order to

stimulate discussion on relevant Christian values. Finally the groups were to be asked to extrapolate their time charts according to how they imagined the medium-term future, and also to how they might ideally wish it to be.

Whatever merits, if any, there might have been in such a research design, it did not get so far as even a first meeting in the field setting itself, and this was on at least four counts. To begin with, to place emphasis on the church's story is to obscure the cultural significance of social processes in the congregation which, if this had been understood, might have anticipated the next point. That is, when in practice the idea of such meetings was suggested to individual congregants, it gradually became clear that most would be extremely reluctant to get involved. The main reason for this, the cultural importance of which only became clear much later, was the socially segmented nature of the congregation. People were uneasy about finding themselves in a group alongside others who are outwith their social circle. Another reason was the proposed location of the meetings in the church hall. In ways which I did not appreciate at the time, the church hall at Riverstane has a symbolic quality which is problematic within congregational culture. The final point here is that none of the questions that were to be asked in the meetings arose from the congregants themselves, but rather from my own preconceptions of what would be culturally significant. Because the research design did not begin with the kinds of questions which members of the congregation bring to their situation, it was unlikely to inspire their enthusiastic participation.

The lesson of this was that it is in the nature of ethnography to be continually responding and adapting to conditions in the field rather than attempting to apply a rigid approach. Jorgensen (1989: 14) refers to this in terms of

a logic and process of inquiry that is open-ended, flexible, opportunistic and requires constant redefinition of what is problematic.

Accordingly, my research strategy was adapted to the conditions in the field setting by proceeding as an observer-as-participant until it was time to begin conducting ethnographic interviews with individuals. After twelve months of participant observation on a part-time basis I had sufficient cultural awareness to do this adequately, and it also meant that my rapport with individuals had so developed that it was not difficult to secure their cooperation as key informants. The result was that much of the material which arose in the ethnographic interviews was already recognisable from my participant observation up to that point, and this made it possible to ask better, more effective questions.

B. Selection of Interviewees

In Chapter Two, general issues of validity (rather than reliability) in ethnographic research were discussed, and germane to this is the matter of interviewee selection at Riverstane. Clearly the quality of cultural information which can be obtained from ethnographic interviews partly depends on choosing informants who are well placed to provide it. One basic criterion for the choice of interviewees at Riverstane is that they had to be able to express themselves sufficiently well. This is not dependent upon intellect, personality, or social class, but upon how willing and capable the person is to talk at length. It also depends upon the ability of the researcher to establish and sustain personal rapport and cooperation with the informant. It was therefore necessary to choose interviewees who, at least potentially, had sufficient openness in order to share their experiences, but this did not necessarily mean that there had to be prior affinity or an already friendly relationship with informants.

Accordingly, some of the interviewees were congregants whom I did not know personally beforehand but had learned about through others.

From the participant observation in the months preceding the interviews, a knowledge of the morphology of the congregation in terms of its main formal structures made it possible to select interviewees who reflect the variety of these organisational groupings. Given that congregants tend to have a part in many of them at the same time, it would consequently be difficult to have a particular bias towards or against any one of these. However, this is not to suggest that the congregation is to be understood in terms of its organisational structures. Anthony Cohen comments (1985: 19-20):

the community is not approached as a morphology, as a structure of institutions capable of objective definition and description. Instead, we try to understand 'community' by seeking to capture members' experience of it. Instead of asking, 'What does it look like to us? What are its theoretical implications?', we ask, 'What does it appear to mean to its members?' Rather than describing analytically the form of the structure from an external vantage point, we are attempting to penetrate the structure, to look outwards from its core.

Accordingly, the ethnographic account of this thesis is not especially concerned with mapping out the formal structures of Riverstane Church, and it refers to these only in passing where relevant to the discussion.

A total of twenty interviewees were selected. As it happens this is a relatively high proportion of the most regular attenders at Riverstane. With regard to the average total attendance on a normal Sunday morning, it represents about ten percent of the gathering as a whole. However, because of the fact that many of the people present on any given Sunday are not members of Riverstane Church, but are tourists or other visitors, on a conservative estimate this number of interviewees is probably more than one fifth of

those who attend practically every Sunday. Again, in the interests of reflecting the normal differences among congregants, and without necessarily seeking mathematical precision, the interviewees selected varied according to age and how long they have been associated with the congregation, roughly in keeping with the balance of these constituencies among church members at Riverstane. Part of the research ethics was to assure key informants that their anonymity would be safeguarded, so that any interview material used would not contain information by which they could be identified, and this means that they are described here in general categories.

Of the twenty interviewees, fourteen were women. As in many congregations, men are in the minority at Riverstane, although in this case the men hold more power since there is an unofficial policy not to have women elders. Also, fourteen interviewees were of full retirement age and above, reflecting the majority of those in the congregation who are elderly or in later life. Of the others, one is aged under 40, one is under 50, two are in their 50s, and two are around the age of 60. Again, this is roughly consistent with the age groups in the congregation. In connection with the length of time people have been associated with the congregation, two of the informants had been members for about 5 years, six for about 10 years, six for about 15 to 20 years, and six for about 30 years and above. The total number of interviews conducted was 52. In most cases there were three or four separate interviews, depending on how much people had to say. In three instances there was only a single interview, and the maximum was six interviews.

As well as their willingness and ability to talk at length about congregational life, the practical matter of the availability of key informants over several interviews was a consideration in selecting them. But given the proportion of retired people in the congregation, this was not

problematic. Other criteria related to factors which contribute to the validity of interview results. For example, persons who might be in a marginalised position within the congregation, or who could be inclined to overstate or understate aspects of congregational life were considered less suitable. The same would apply to a person volunteering to act as an informant without my prompting, so that I only approached people privately and individually. In each case it was necessary to reflect as best as possible beforehand on whether the person might be at a disadvantage in the above respects.

However, this is not to say that the marginalised person or the enthusiastic volunteer is inevitably someone who is going to offer a distorted version of things. It is not a matter of ruling people out because their accounts are deemed in advance to be untrustworthy, but rather being alert to at least the risk of motivational factors which would either compromise validity or simply open it to question. Another way of safeguarding validity, for example, was in the interviewing of people such as married couples together, on the basis that given prior suitability there is perhaps less likelihood of significant overstatement or understatement, whether intentional or unintentional.

A particular issue in the choice of interviewees concerns those who are in positions of leadership and influence. While office-bearers were indeed among the key informants, including members of the kirk session and others with positions of responsibility, it was decided that there is an inherent obstacle to selecting as key informants those who are in overall charge of some aspect of congregational life if it means there is the possibility of any conscious or unconscious agenda operating. Moreover, various informants commented independently that those who are in a more elevated position would have less awareness of concrete

aspects of congregational life. On the other hand, such leaders clearly have voices to be heard as much as anyone else and so it is desirable that they should be heard. As a solution to this it was decided to interact with these more powerful church members in the context of asking appropriate ethnographic questions in the course of normal conversation as an aspect of the ongoing participant observation in the field setting. The same approach applied with any congregants who did not happen to be among the key informants, including others who could equally have been but were not, and also those might not have been considered as suitable interviewees, such as congregants who are in some sense marginalised.

This research strategy thereby gives something of a hermeneutical privilege (an idea raised earlier on pages 57 and 93 above) to congregants other than those who are the most powerful members of the church, not in the sense of trying to exclude anyone, but rather in the selection of those who have the role of being key informants. Mark Kline Taylor comments on the rationale for acknowledging in general terms a hermeneutical privilege for those who are excluded from structures of power (1990: 64-65):

When I say that these excluded ones have a privilege, this is not in the preposterous sense that only the excluded ones have the truth...There is a certain privilege lying in the expanded vision of social and political life that marginalized...groups have in ways that those at the center of social political systems usually do not have.

Apart from the reasons of promoting validity mentioned above, there were also cultural reasons behind this hermeneutical privilege. From early participant observation it was clear that Riverstane Church has a strongly hierarchical power distribution, with a relatively small number of people in keen competition with each other for most of the power. As a result the generality of congregants are those who are not engaged in this process but are instead affected by it, so that arguably it is their

perspectives which provide a more appropriate mirror of congregational life. Consistent with this, then, there were no ethnographic interviews with persons such as the minister, the minister's wife, the session clerk, the treasurer, members of the finance committee, conveners of committees, or leaders of organisations. In this way, the particularity of the field setting once more played a part in determining the parameters of research strategy. This relates to the nature of the micro-politics within the congregation, and is an important theme that will be returned to in later chapters. However, it is important to emphasise again that ethnographic interviews were indeed conducted with members of the kirk session and others who hold positions of responsibility in the congregation.

One of the most important criteria in selecting interviewees was that they be largely among the most regular attenders at Riverstone. These core members of the congregation were considered to be the most suitable because of their continuity of presence at church from week to week, so that their perspectives are most likely to represent congregational life accurately. In this connection, Spradley refers to an emphasis upon "the most experienced members of a culture" (1979: 155). That is not to say, however, that those without perfect attendance or those who only attend occasionally had no contribution to make. Accordingly, their perspectives were encountered in normal conversation through ongoing participant observation including the perspectives of some who no longer attend at all. While it can reasonably be claimed that the most representative congregants are those who are present most often, essentially the congregation as a whole is included in the research, but with particular attention being given to those who take part in ethnographic interviews.

A final point here relates to another cultural feature which has implications for the selection of interviewees. It was

noted earlier that the social segmentation of the congregation was a major reason why the original research design could not be implemented, since congregants preferred to remain within their own social circle. Similarly when selecting interviewees it would prove to be essential that they reflect a variety of social circles within the congregation. While there are indeed areas of consensus among informants' perspectives, the interview material exhibits important differentiation and this is a central theme in the chapters ahead.

C. Interview Method

One of the main fieldwork decisions made was in connection with the type of interviews that were conducted. Given the research question concerning the ways in which church members experience their congregational culture, the aim was to gain access to their ways of looking at the life of the congregation rather than to introduce preformulated categories and structures, and so it was decided to take a non-directive approach to the interviews. For this reason it was decided not to devise questionnaires or interview schedules, but rather to ask open-ended questions which would allow the informant to select the topics discussed, and help to minimise any researcher bias. To minimise this further, since the aim was to uncover the subjects which the interviewee considers to be relevant and not to introduce those which come from the researcher himself, care was taken not to ask leading questions or to raise subjects other than those referred to by the informant. The idea was to give interviewees the opportunity to speak about their own selection of material, with the researcher using follow-on questions in order to gain more detailed information.

Interviews always took place in the homes of informants, with the emphasis upon conducting them in an informal and

relaxed atmosphere. At the beginning of the interview, after allowing some time for ordinary conversation and exchanging news, I generally began with non-technical explanations about the research, what it was I wanted to ask about, and how I would be using the information. As a matter of research ethics I also assured the informants of complete confidentiality, explaining that I would not repeat to others in the congregation anything which they said during the interview, adding that when writing the thesis any quotations from them would be anonymous and without clues to the identity of the speaker. Further, I gave the undertaking that no-one else would learn from me about the fact they were informants, but on the other hand I had no objections to them telling others themselves, so that confidentiality was guaranteed without placing any burden of secrecy upon them.

I also made a point of explaining that the interviews would not be like ordinary conversations in which people take turns and share the work of maintaining the flow of communication, but rather that the talking would be asymmetrical with me listening for the most part. Lastly, I asked about writing 'scratch' notes (see page 89 above) while they were talking, and explained that although it meant looking down often, I would still be listening carefully and there was no need to pause. The interviews typically lasted ninety minutes to two hours, including time for ordinary conversation and digression, especially as there would always be hospitality to accept. A further interview was arranged if time ran out, and there was never any reluctance to continue these as often as necessary, usually on a week-to-week basis. At the end of the interview there would be some leave-taking conversation and I would finish with my thanks.

Although extracts from ethnographic interviews will be introduced in the next chapter, where it will be appropriate

to give a more detailed account of the types of question asked, generally the opening question in a first interview went as follows: "Tell me what happens when you go to church on a typical Sunday morning." Then, through the use of clarification questions and follow-on questions based on interviewees' responses, it was possible to learn about the categories which the informants themselves use to construct their interpretations of congregational life. Usually the amount of detail generated by these questions required three or four separate interviews, sometimes more and sometimes fewer, to work through the material. While the above example refers to a specific cultural scene, namely the routine at church on a Sunday morning, the same procedure was followed in asking questions about other cultural scenes, such as meetings of the kirk session and various other organisations. This was a highly effective strategy, in that it produced significant cultural information beyond my own experience as a participant observer. With each interviewee the approach was gradually to work through all the cultural scenes which the informant was in a position to describe.

In all this it was essential for the researcher to restrict the interviews to the informants' own subjects. Germane to this is the question of sources of bias in research. Ken Plummer (1983: 102) notes that bias can arise from the three sources of informant, researcher, and the interaction between the two. In the context of this research, interaction bias has already been discussed in terms of role contamination, and informant bias under the selection of interviewees. With regard to researcher bias, the researcher as a person is not a changeless being, and varies as an interpreter from day to day as well as in steadily acquiring experience. Further, as Plummer comments (102):

a 'non-directive' interviewer might be accused of harbouring the desire to encourage a person to tell the more outrageous and problematic things in his or her life, thereby encouraging a distortion of the more

sensational episodes.

As a result, and as an ethical matter as well as in the interests of validity, care was taken not to skew the interviews in these directions, yet without equally "harbouring the desire" to positively discourage informants in what they wished to talk about. To help minimise possible researcher bias in this respect, the interviews always ended by asking about what has not been covered that might have been discussed. That way a corrective to any bias could be incorporated in further interviews to explore these areas.

However, the idea of purging the research of all bias is to invoke what Martyn Hammersley refers to as naive realism (1992: 34). As Plummer notes (1983: 104), this would involve:

a researcher without a face to give off feelings, a subject with clear and total knowledge unshaped by the situation, a neutral setting, and so forth. Any 'truth' found in such a disembodied neutralised context must be a very odd one indeed. It is precisely through these 'sources of bias' that a 'truth' comes to be assembled. The task of the researcher, therefore, is not to nullify these variables, but to be aware of, describe publicly and suggest how these have assembled a specific 'truth'.

As a validity check throughout the interviews I would often repeat my interpretation of what informants had said as a strategy to ensure that it was consistent with what the person intended to mean. A further check on validity at the end of the empirical component of the research was when I revisited the informants to report back on the perspectives which arose from the interviews as a whole. In doing this I summarised in non-technical terms the various features that were germane to the ethnographic account presented in the chapters ahead and invited the informants to respond. The result was that typically a majority of the cultural features in question resonated with the interviewees, while they gave a more indifferent (rather than negative) response to the remainder. This is consistent with the

differentiality which is a feature of the ways in which people in a community relate to their culture. On this matter, Hammersley notes that the credibility of an ethnographic account should not be tied to whether the people studied judge the account to be true (1992: 65). As he adds, it might be in their interests not to accept what is true, or indeed in their interests to accept what is not true, or it might simply be that they lack awareness of what nevertheless happens to be true.

III. Analysis and the Ethnographic Account

It was noted above that early participant observation had the function of providing sufficient cultural awareness in order to conduct effective ethnographic interviews, and that much of the cultural information which followed was recognisable to the researcher as a result. However, it was also the case that interview material contributed to the ongoing participant observation through alerting the researcher to phenomena which would otherwise not have been noticed. In this way the participant observation also functioned as a check on the interview material, combining attention to what informants say with studying what the congregants as a whole do. As a result the interpretations of the interviewees served to guide that of the researcher, which in turn guided the analysis of interview material.

This final part of the chapter now turns to the matter of drawing ethnographic conclusions from the interviews and participant observation, and discusses the selective representation of congregational culture at Riverstane Church which is the ethnographic account contained in the chapters ahead.

A. Interpreting Interview Material

In this chapter there has been a certain preference in relation to the terminology used. The information contained in the ethnographic interviews, for example, is not referred to as 'data'. Regarding the selection of interviewees, there was no reference to 'population' or 'sample'. This preference is partly intended to avoid connotations of scientific method, explanation, and experimental reliability. As a hermeneutical process, ethnography is concerned with validity in interpretation rather than claims to objective knowledge (a point noted earlier on pages 68-69 above). In this connection, Cohen highlights the nature of cultures as constructs of the mind (1987: 18):

They have to be the subject of ethnographic claim rather than of scientific demonstration. They are recordable by intuition rather than by direct observation or statistic, and must be thought of as the ideas behind the words rather than the words themselves.

However, the production of an ethnographic account still requires method in the analysis of cultural information, and that is the topic of this section.

A prior question in relation to the analysis of interviews concerns the form of the material and how it was gathered. It has already been noted that throughout the interviews I constantly took scratch notes while listening closely to informants, only looking up during pauses or when it was appropriate to stop writing or when engaging in some dialogue. Most of the speaking was done by the interviewees, while I mostly wrote. It was decided not to make audio recordings of the interviews in case this would introduce an unhelpful tension, especially in the early stages when interviewees were more apprehensive about the process.

As a matter of priority the scratch notes were written up on the same day and preferably as short a time as possible

after the interview. As opposed to transcription, the product was a verbatim record of the interview reconstructed from the notes and from memory which was still fresh. Care was taken to reproduce the vocabulary used by informants (that is, not to translate their language into the researcher's language) and as much as possible to avoid paraphrasing. Typically, each interview would take about two hours to reconstruct. In terms of quantity of material, the 52 interviews generated a hundred pages of A4 in single-spaced type.

While this corpus of material was the basic textual source for the ethnographic account presented in the chapters ahead, it is important to note that equal significance is given to the experience of the researcher through participant observation in the setting, in conjunction with ethnographic interviews, including the accumulation of headnotes by the researcher (described on page 90 above). Secondary to these were interim fieldwork reports written during the course of participant observation, which were reflections upon the researcher's own experiences in the field setting, together with the early impressions and first interpretations that were being brought to congregational life. In such material, Spradley refers to the inclusion of details about "ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs, and problems that arise during field work" (1979: 76). These fieldnotes were not directly incorporated in the ethnographic account, except insofar as the process was informed by the stages they marked in the researcher's gradually developing grasp of congregational culture. Other than the above, cultural information was also gained from ephemera such as the church magazine, leaflets, audio and video recordings, old documentation and correspondence, and use of artefacts including hymn books and communion ware.

Following the reconstruction of scratch notes into verbatim accounts, the basic analytical task was to construct an

index or inventory of the interview material. The coding process involved taking the reconstructed interviews sentence by sentence and assigning a category to the units of content in what people said. As far as possible these categories were expressed in the terms used by the congregants themselves. The next stage was to organise related categories into larger domains of meaning. On this point, Jorgensen writes (1989: 110):

Efforts to code data will lead to sorting, sifting, organizing, and reorganizing these materials, usually into larger units and components. Sometimes this involves flashes of insight about how things fit together, while at other times it depends on less dramatic hunches, or simply hard work.

The labour of sifting through fieldnotes and sorting their contents is a suitable task for computer-assisted analysis. In the context of this research, however, the use of ethnographic software packages such as is discussed by Ian Dey (1993) was not a practical option for reasons of access to compatible computer systems, but in other circumstances this would be considered. Another benefit of using such software is the detail of analysis which can be delivered, and again this research does not aspire to the degree of complexity offered by these instruments. The more technical the analysis, the more resolution there is in the results, and given the relatively straightforward approach taken in this research, the ethnographic conclusions reached are correspondingly measured in their claims.

In identifying domains, the questions asked of smaller units of meaning were, "What cultural information does this item impart?" and, "What larger phenomenon is it an example of?" So for example, as will become clear in later chapters, the unit of 'keeping tourists out of the building around the times of services' belongs to the domain of 'relationships with outsiders'. Another example is the unit of 'only men are members of the kirk session', which belongs to the domain of 'tradition'. As well as looking for categories which are examples of another category, domains can also be

identified by asking if a category is a result of another, or a cause of another, or a stage of another, or a characteristic of another, and so on. These and other criteria are what Spradley refers to as "semantic relationships" (1979: 111). These tentative domains were then brought to the ongoing participant observation and revised in terms of the interview material until there was a reasonable fit between the two. In other words, the ethnographic interviews helped to make sense of the participant observation, which in turn was used to make sense of the ethnographic interviews.

Spradley makes the point that all ethnographers have to limit the scope of their analysis, so that it is not necessary to identify every domain and each element in these domains (1979: 132-133). The choice is either to do a surface analysis of multiple domains or to concentrate on an in-depth analysis of fewer domains. In practice, however, "most ethnographers adopt a compromise" (134). The compromise taken in this research was to select a number of domains and attempt to understand the relationships between them on the basis of participant observation guided by the interpretations of informants in ethnographic interviews. Again, a further level of detail beyond that of identifying domains is to uncover the meanings which people attach to the symbolism they contain. In the context of this research, while certain aspects of the symbol system in the congregation are indeed described, the focus is on how these symbols relate to the social processes of the congregation rather than exploring in depth the various meanings which informants associate with symbolic features.

Germane to this is the matter of refining the research focus. Peter Stromberg (1986), for example, in his ethnography of the Swedish congregation at Immanuelskyrkan in Stockholm, focuses upon the different meanings which congregants attach to the doctrines of their faith. On the

other hand, Stromberg is less concerned with the social processes of the congregation. In this thesis, the focus is upon symbolic features which are operative in the social processes of the congregation, and notes the differences which are evident in the way congregants relate to these, but without going on to explore in greater detail the differential meanings which they attach to features of the symbol system. Further, no particular attention is given to the dimension of congregants' faith and the ways in which they interpret Christian doctrine. The basis for making such a selection of focus was partly dictated by the interview material, and partly by the researcher's participant observation. In the first place, while some informants did indeed allude to matters of personal faith, it was not a leitmotiv of the interview material whereas reference to social processes in the congregation was indeed prominent. In the second place, from the participant observation it appeared that it was the social processes, more than anything else, which set the parameters of congregational life at Riverstane.

In keeping with this, Jorgensen comments that the field setting "limits and facilitates what may be investigated" (1989: 41). He adds (44):

Most human settings are to some extent political...In other words, they involve the use of power by people. In human settings, furthermore, people are ranked by values associated with the positions they occupy and the roles they perform. Human settings generally are stratified: differential amounts of prestige are attached to people based on their status and role. Power and prestige usually are related: people with more prestige tend to have greater power than people accorded less prestige. Power and prestige within human settings commonly are the source of conflict and disagreement, sometimes among rival factions.

These are features of the field setting at Riverstane Church which limited and facilitated the selective interpretation contained in the ethnographic account. Moreover, Spradley (1979: 200) provides a list of universal cultural themes which tend to occur in field settings, and these mostly

relate to social processes: social conflict, cultural contradiction, informal techniques of social control, managing impersonal social relationships, acquiring and maintaining status, and solving problems. From the ethnographic interviews and participant observation, it is matters such as these which seem to concern congregants at Riverstane Church, and that is why these are at the focus of this research.

A final point here is that the research focus was also partly dictated by the selection of key informants. Given that, for reasons explained earlier, the interviewees were among those who attend church most frequently, it would not have been feasible to focus the research upon (for example) the perspectives of the many congregants who are rarely present at Riverstane.

B. Voices in the Ethnographic Account

In the chapters which follow, the selective account of congregational life at Riverstane Church is ultimately that of the researcher, albeit essentially informed by the perspectives of congregants. While it results from the fusion between the researcher's horizon and that of the congregation, nevertheless it is the researcher's interpretation which is being presented. A major implication of this concerns the use of language. It was noted earlier on page 51 above that as a hermeneutical phenomenon it is not possible to gain an understanding of a situation other than in terms of our own concepts. The consequences of this for the chapters ahead are twofold.

It will become clear that the account of congregational culture presented here involves terminology which belongs to the researcher rather than the congregants themselves. In order to interpret the situation at Riverstane Church,

concepts such as 'boundary', 'symbolic boundary', 'micro-politics', 'deference', and 'dissonance' are introduced. None of these were used by any of the informants, but were brought to the situation by the researcher. However, it is not the case that these concepts were selected in advance with a view to applying them to the situation at Riverstane Church, but rather that they arose within the process of interpretation as the terms accessible to the researcher which best described the conditions encountered in the field setting.

As a result of the inevitable preference given to the researcher's concepts, it also becomes necessary to represent the voice of congregants in their own words as far as possible. In this connection, J Fernandez comments (1987: 12):

The anthropological voice has fundamentally to do with the inclination to hear voices. An important part of our vocation is "listening to voices," and our methods are the procedures that best enable us to hear voices, to represent voices, to translate voices. Anthropological work that does not contain voices somehow misses its calling. It is work that misses our opportunity to listen to voices. If it does not contain the authentic voices of the subjects of investigation, throw it aside, because it does not have lasting value. Anthropology is paying attention to the voices of those among whom we live and study.

Accordingly, in the remaining chapters of Part Two, ample reference will be made to the voices of congregants as they are heard in ethnographic interviews. This means that a considerable proportion of the material which follows in the next three chapters will be other than the words of the researcher. As well as echoing the concern expressed by Fernandez in the above extract, the intention behind this is also to give the reader a sense of the content of the ethnographic interviews as the basis for the research conclusions which are presented here.

Finally, with regard to Part Three of this thesis, only the voice of the researcher will be heard there when the

discussion turns to theological reflection. While this is dependent upon the ethnographic account of Part Two, it seeks to abstract from the situation at Riverstane Church in ways that have broader relevance for congregational life at a comparative level.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to present the horizon of the researcher insofar as it relates to the interpretation of congregational culture at Riverstane Church. It also described the impact of participant roles upon the content of the research and the fieldwork strategy, together with questions of validity and bias. Finally the approach to analysing fieldwork material was outlined, including its implications for the research focus and the use of language in the ethnographic account.

The next chapter will consider the horizon at Riverstane Church for the first time so far in this thesis, and introduces some of the features of congregational life that will be discussed further in the chapters ahead.

Context and Cultural Scenes at Riverstane Church

Introduction

In Part One of the thesis, the first chapter gave an account of the interpretation of situations as a form of hermeneutical Practical Theology; the second chapter situated the qualitative empirical approach to interpreting culture here in terms of the social anthropological method of ethnography; and the third chapter situated the focus of the research in terms of interpreting congregational culture. In Part Two so far, the previous chapter situated the horizon of the researcher as it relates to the field study, gave an account of how the field study originated, and set out matters of fieldwork and analysis.

This chapter now turns to situating the horizon of Riverstane Church. This is done in two sections. The first describes relevant features of congregational Sitz-im-Leben in terms of historical background and more recent circumstances. The second section uses verbatim extracts from ethnographic interviews and material from participant observation to introduce some cultural scenes of congregational life at Riverstane, focusing upon the gathering of congregants on Sunday mornings, with particular reference to their routine experiences before and after the time of worship. From these, themes are introduced which have importance for the chapters ahead, and these relate to social segmentation, the accompanying presence of boundaries, and an associated experience of conflict. Attention will be turned to church services in the next chapter.

I. Sociohistorical Context

In Chapter Two it was noted (on page 78 above) that 'contextualisation' is part of the anthropological triangle formed with 'ethnography' and 'comparison' at the other vertices, so that instead of a purely synchronic quality, there is also a diachronic or through-time perspective. That is, the experience of congregants is considered both as Erfahrung (continuity of experience over time) and as Erlebnis (discrete experience at points in time): "Erlebnis is something you have...Erfahrung is something you undergo" (translators' preface in Gadamer, 1991: xii-xiv). Here, some aspects of the distant past and more recent history at Riverstane which contribute to the collective sense of self in the congregation are briefly described.

A. Brief Historical Notes

Riverstane Church, which by denomination is part of the Church of Scotland, is toponymous with the settlement that developed into the widely spread city of the present day, is located on an early site of Christian worship dating back to the sixth century which was founded in the lifetime of Saint Columba, and is set on ground which had previously been dedicated in honour of Saint Ninian. Nothing is left of the original monastic buildings, although it is thought that some of the stone was probably re-used in later rebuilding to become part of the mediaeval Riverstane Church of today which stands on the same spot on the bank sloping down to the river.

As the burial place of a notable bishop and saint who founded the celtic monastery on that site, and who was patron of Riverstane Church throughout the middle ages, its early importance is reflected in the status it held as the ecclesiastical centre not only of its immediate environs,

but also of the whole territory within the kingdom of the period. By the eleventh century, however, the region was subsumed by the kingdom of the Scots and consequently the ecclesiastical centre shifted elsewhere.

Riverstane Church forged strong ties with the settlement which grew to become the city now surrounding it, including close bonds with the guilds of tradesmen, merchants and other civic bodies. In the fifteenth century one bishop of Riverstane founded a university which, prior to constructing its own premises nearby, held its first meetings in the church. Also in the fifteenth century Riverstane was granted an archbishopric, reflecting the ecclesiastical importance it maintained. The next century, though, was to bring it into the Reformation movement, and after a succession of Protestant archbishops the incumbents who then followed were simply called ministers of Riverstane. Given the profound relationship the church has with the founding of the city and its institutions, and having the historical status of being by far the first among local churches, its substantial continuities with the community gave the subsequently Presbyterian ministers of Riverstane Church a position of considerable prominence.

Since the Reformation the ministers there have included distinguished public figures and statesmen, several of whom have become moderators of the general assembly of the Church of Scotland. But within the Presbyterian system of church government, and together with its principle of parity of esteem among ministers, no order of precedence is predicated de jure upon the status of the church in which any minister holds office. As a result, in modern times ministers of Riverstane Church have had no privileged position or authority ex officio over other ministers in the presbytery.

In relatively recent years, one event with far-reaching consequences which can be highlighted because of its visible

impact is the depopulating of the immediate area around Riverstane Church, when old housing was demolished in the early 1960s by the city council to make way for improvements to the road system and for large-scale redevelopment of the district. This relocated many families away from the parish, resulting in a large dispersion of community life from the neighbourhood, and bringing into sharp relief the largely gathered constituency of Riverstane Church in contrast to the level of local membership of the congregation. In terms of demographics, data from the 1991 census (analysed by the local presbytery in conjunction with the city planning department) reveal a total resident population in the parish of 592 people. A designated urban priority area, 448 of the residents are described as being among the poorest ten percent of the Scottish population, with the remainder being in the next ten percent.

B. Effective History at Riverstane Church

Already in these few introductory statements of a most selective and general nature regarding historical background, there is much which helps to trace the contours of the present horizon of the congregation at Riverstane. Perhaps the most visibly apparent feature is the architectural design of the church. As a mediaeval building it has a style which stands in contrast not only to other buildings in the vicinity but also throughout the city as a whole. Its large and imposing gothic structure with separate stages of construction dating from the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and distinctly blackened patina on the stone, combine to add emphasis to its contrasting appearance with other buildings. Inside the cruciform church, details in the furnishings, fabric, and stained glass are moderately ornate, the vaulting arches lift the gaze high, and the aesthetic qualities of the space as a whole prompt typically enthusiastic comments to be

written in the visitor book. In effect the visual aspect of Riverstane functions as a powerful symbol to which people relate in differential ways, whether it be as a tourist attraction, an historic edifice, or a place of worship. This has consequences, as will be described in the second part of this chapter, for conflict surrounding the ways in which people relate not only to the building but also to other people across its boundary, particularly as insiders towards outsiders.

Together with the unusualness of the architecture, there is also an ecclesiastically complicated situation arising from the historical circumstances at Riverstane. Unlike the bishop's palace which was situated adjacently, the fact that the church building survived the Reformation is itself significant when, in the break with the old order, other churches of its type were being destroyed elsewhere. To protect the building from attack at the time, the local guild of tradesmen mounted an armed defence of Riverstane Church, an event which is attested by the bullet marks visible in the stone and wood.

That the mother church of an archiepiscopal See, being powerfully identified with the old order, should emerge from the Reformation as a Presbyterian church is a situation of more than historic significance. The very form of the building, which by definition was originally designed for an ecclesiastical and liturgical tradition not generally associated today with Presbyterian churches, is a constant indicator of its complex origins. To the present time Riverstane is continually mistaken by some tourists and their taxi drivers as a Roman church or as an Episcopalian church. Some members of the Roman community who live in the city around the church believe it should yet belong to their archdiocese, as indeed do many of the local residents who come predominantly from that tradition. Riverstane makes an awkward fit even to some of those within the Protestant

community, since its design has the appearance of being the depository of Roman tradition. There are also some in the congregation itself who think of the church in other than Presbyterian categories.

The complexity regarding the community to which Riverstone Church belongs also arises in a different connection. The ownership of the building is held neither by the Church of Scotland nor by the congregation, but rather by the state. As an historic building which is considered to be a treasure of national heritage, being the most complete mediaeval church of its kind on the Scottish mainland, it is essentially public property and so is in the care of Historic Scotland, a department of the Scottish Office. Because of this public ownership the congregation is exempt from any expense in relation to the physical maintenance of the building, and is in effect a free tenant with running costs restricted to a contribution towards heating and lighting for its own activities.

It also follows that organisations outside the church can and do quite properly arrange to have use of the building. Occasional grand events are customary features of the Riverstone diary, for example as took place in the recent inauguration of a new university in the city. That was one instance in which the Roman archbishop played a leading part, along with the moderator of presbytery and representatives of other faith traditions, while the minister of Riverstone was not invited. However, a more routine scenario involving other institutions is when civic bodies come to Riverstone for their annual 'kirking', which is incorporated within the usual Sunday morning service.

While the number of people present on a Sunday morning can vary from around one hundred to as many as three hundred, this includes significant augmentation by visitors, whether as organisations or as individuals. As a congregation

substantially without local membership, the vast majority of people gather from a distance and often from across the city or beyond. With negligible exception, the people who go to Riverstane as opposed to another church do so for reasons other than it being physically convenient. Such reasons as they have will be discussed more in the next chapter, and these include the building, the choral and organ music, the style of worship, and social reasons. But given the weight of history, the architectural significance, and the public visibility of Riverstane, its distinctiveness is somewhat in tension with its position as a Presbyterian church, which is to say that officially it has an inter pares status with other churches. This tension is accentuated by its role as a kind of 'civic temple' which has the effect of nurturing a sense of Riverstane being special and important, especially in the grand events reaching their height in periodic state occasions, including visits of royalty. As a result, the conflict between collective sense of self and the reality of decline at Riverstane sets up something of a sense of dissonance within the congregation.

Other dissonance in relation to present circumstances is associated with the ambitious visitor centre project embarked upon by the congregation in the mid-1980s. This was an undercapitalised building programme on a site adjacent to the church. It was intended to provide the congregation with impressive hall accommodation and a heritage centre for tourist business, as well as being a commercial venture offering conference facilities. The fundraising target was £3 million, including public and private sector sponsorship, and the congregation itself raised £350,000, but in the end a rescue package from the city council, described by some congregants as a 'sell-out', took over the ownership of the property. As a result the completed building became a municipal museum, with the congregation's share in the premises being a limited space in the basement. This is a sensitive subject among

congregants, who generally regard the outcome to be a poor return on their investment of personal resources.

Two years after the completion of that project, Historic Scotland began an upgrading programme on the church building itself to modernise heating, lighting and electrical systems, entirely at their own expense, which approached £1½ million. The scale of this work was such that the interior of the church had the appearance of a construction site over a period of three years, with various parts of the building not being usable on a rotational basis extending over many months. A telling statement of the conditions within the church appeared in one document as follows:

Currently Riverstane is in a state of organised turmoil...The ordered flow of life in Riverstane is severely interrupted - an event unlikely to be repeated in the lifetime of any of us.

The document in question was, significantly, a pamphlet in connection with another fundraising campaign which a group within the congregation took the opportunity to initiate while the upgrading of the building was in progress. This was to renovate the antique church organ, requiring a sum of £380,000 which was successfully raised in half the time it took to generate the £350,000 for the visitor centre. The undertaking was seen by some who were closely involved in the campaign as being partly a means of displacing the sense of failure associated with the other project, and partly a gesticulation directed at those in the congregation who were considered to be responsible for the situation, as well as being a genuinely felt urgency to restore an instrument which to them was of particular historical, musical and symbolic importance.

These various aspects of effective history at Riverstane Church described above are central to the ethnographic account in this thesis. It has been a selective description of sociohistorical context, but not an arbitrary one, guided by themes from ethnographic interviews and participant

observation, combined with relevant historical details (summarised from the HMSO guide to the building), and organised into what is a version of the context at Riverstane. Although other possible versions might make a different selection of information, neither could they be other than selective. However, it is being proposed here that the version presented above is a fair summary of features in the horizon of the congregation arising from its effective history.

It is also being claimed here that if the researcher's version has no privilege over other possible versions, then neither is it any less privileged. This is a claim of validity and truthfulness in the terms that were described in Chapter Two (on page 66 above). It involves a selectivity which is neither misleading nor misrepresenting of the situation. James Clifford (1986: 6) points out that ethnography produces "true fictions," in the sense of fiction as "something made or fashioned," and which is fictional without the connotation of being false. He adds (7):

Even the best ethnographic texts - serious, true fictions - are systems, or economies, of truth... Ethnographic truths are thus inherently partial - committed and incomplete.

Anthony Cohen (1987: 207) refers to ethnographic writing as the presenting of "judgements about one group of people in a manner which will be persuasive to another - that is, to create a 'persuasive fiction'." As a hermeneutical process, it means that along with Hermes, ethnographers promise not to lie. But also with Hermes, neither do they make any claim to tell all truth. This is not to say that ethnographic writing is half-truth, or that truth is being withheld, but rather that it cannot be other than incomplete truth.

II. Cultural Scenes and Social Segmentation

The cultural information presented in this part of the chapter corresponds to the earlier stages of fieldwork, and will be developed further in the chapters ahead as the description progressively thickens. The approach here will be to sketch and then to contextualise a selection of cultural scenes depicting routine aspects of congregational life, based on what congregants say and what they do. This is the 'text-context' paradigm used by Cohen (1987: 19), the procedure associated with Clifford Geertz and interpretivist social anthropologists. It is important to emphasise that the status of the material is not as anecdote or hearsay, but as first-hand accounts of informants combined with observations of the researcher. However, reference to the material as ethnographic 'text' is not to suggest that it is separate from analysis, for it can only be meaningful in so far as it has already been analysed. Again, as with Hermes, while it is not possible to tell all, it will be possible at least to tell some.

A. Gatherings at Sunday Morning Services

As a first glimpse of congregational life at Riverstane, the focus will be on Sunday morning gatherings. Following the sense of the term as used by Spradley (1979: 218, n.2), a cultural scene is a social situation where people apply shared cultural knowledge by which they can function in that situation. People in any given cultural scene will also belong to other cultural scenes at different times and places, and it is an early task in collecting cultural information to determine what the range of different cultural scenes might be. Cultural scenes at Riverstane were identified through participant observation and ethnographic interviews, in which descriptive questions of the type which Spradley calls grand tour questions (1979:

86ff) were asked. These were of the form, "Describe what happens when you go to church on a typical Sunday morning," or, "Take me through the building as if I were a new visitor going to church with you," or, "Tell me what you do from the moment you enter the building." Then mini-tour questions and clarification questions were used to follow up in more detail the information generated by grand tour questions. While the cultural scenes described in this thesis are not exhaustive of the totality of situations experienced by congregants at Riverstane, they represent typical scenarios which subsume cultural features that are in play throughout the arena of congregational life, particularly with regard to social segmentation and the experience of conflict across boundaries.

In the extracts from ethnographic interviews featured in these chapters, the speakers will be specified in each instance. This is to indicate the range of informants being cited as a check against over-reliance upon any individual. To do this, each interviewee is assigned a randomly selected capital letter as an identifying initial which is used consistently throughout the thesis (from A to T). The Arabic numeral following the initial is the interview number with that informant (from 1 to 6), followed by a lower case letter referring to the page of text for that interview (from a to d), and a Roman numeral following the lower case letter to signify the paragraph on the page of text. For example, J.2.c.iv. refers to the fourth paragraph of the third page of the second interview with informant J. Occasionally, there will also be quotations from other unspecified informants who were not acting as interviewees. A final note here is that, to distinguish them from citations of other texts, interview extracts will be enclosed within quotation marks.

1. Going to the Church

When interviewees gave their account of a typical Sunday morning at Riverstane, they made their own choice of beginning points. Some began with the journey to church and having to leave in good time to get there early. For others it was having to leave the car a few hundred yards away from the church, and across a busy main road, because of the lack of parking facilities nearer by. This can mean having to pay for a parking space even though it is a Sunday and, on the way over to the church, being caught up in any weather conditions which if inclement can be a difficulty for older people. The accounts of other interviewees began with their experiences once inside the church, and for some the starting point was virtually the beginning of the service.

Getting to church on a Sunday morning would ordinarily seem to be a subject of limited relevance to congregational culture, since it is a matter of routine normally taken for granted. Yet at Riverstane the business of getting to church is not a trivial feature of congregational life. It has already been noted that most of the people present in the church on a Sunday will have travelled across the city and beyond. Those who rely on public transport for shorter journeys, which in some cases are divided into two stages, report their frustrations at the limitations of Sunday bus services. There are also regular attenders who make round journeys by car of over fifty miles, with some travelling much farther.

Clearly there are people strongly committed to attending at Riverstane, rather than going to some other church which might be nearer to hand. There are others, of course, who rarely if ever attend. One interviewee parodied this by saying:

"Some of these people have no idea what church membership is about: 'I come regularly to Riverstane - every Armistice Day'." (L.1.a.iv.).

For each member present on a given Sunday there are perhaps two or three others choosing not to be there, even taking into account those who for various reasons are not able to be present. Apart from matters of health, infirmity, or personal circumstances, there are many nominal members who in effect have no link with the congregation, including those who live in another part of the country or indeed in another country. In a notional church roll of about seven hundred, the proportion of those who rarely or never attend is at least one half. There is also a proportion of the membership who attend only intermittently, again for various reasons. But all this is not to detract from the evidently strong commitment which does exist among those in the congregation who attend almost every Sunday. The question of what motivates such commitment is significant since, as will be described in due course, there are features of congregational life that diminish the motivation of others. But in spite of the practical obstacles which range from mild inconvenience to considerable difficulty concerning access, public transport, and the mobility of elderly persons, there are many people in the congregation who are consistently faithful in their attendance. It is not being suggested that there is anything unusual about Riverstane having congregants with varied levels of commitment. Probably any church has its core group of solid attenders, with another group of those who attend more occasionally, and a third group who rarely or never attend. But, all other things being equal socially and spiritually in the motivation of people who go to any church, the point being made is that Riverstane has an almost exclusively gathered congregation and those who attend solidly do so regardless of the sometimes considerable difficulties involved.

As a comparative note here, Peter Stromberg's ethnography of the Swedish congregation at Immanuelskyrkan in Stockholm (1986) focuses on the 'commitment system' (described on pages 128-129 above), by which membership of that community

as an insider entails the expression of commitment to its defining symbols, even though these mean different things to different people. For some at Riverstane, a criterion of commitment is to be a solid attender, and on those occasions when such a congregant might be absent it becomes a topic of conversation among others, partly out of normal concern for the individual in case of illness, but also partly because solid attendance is a key element of their commitment. Congregants who share this commitment typically let others know in advance if they are going to be away for any reason. For some there are further criteria of commitment, such as arriving significantly earlier than others and staying significantly later.

The question of what motivates such commitment leads to a methodological point. In one sense it would seem an obvious research procedure to ask congregants directly why they are so committed. However, Spradley (1979: 82) explains that ethnographic interviews should avoid 'why' questions because they encode value judgements and short-circuit the interpretative process, so that a more searching approach should be attempted instead.

2. Going into the Church

Having travelled to the church, there is still the matter of getting inside the building. Informant C comments:

"The first thing that happens is that you can't get in for people being pushed out. They get put out because they're visitors. They're often foreign and can't speak English, so they don't understand. You're getting looks from them because you're getting in." (C.1.a.iii.).

Several interviewees independently drew attention to the phenomenon of "people being pushed out" and its effect of blocking the way of church members trying to get in. This was one of the unexpected areas of cultural information that arose in the interviews. Before then, the researcher did not at first know that it happened at all, although it was

encountered later in participant observation. It is not that there is always a continuous stream of "people being pushed out", but rather that it is a regularly occurring situation. During the summer months when the number of tourists is at its peak, it is not an atypical scene every Sunday prior to the morning and evening services at Riverstane, and also occurs to a degree throughout the rest of the year.

People do not expect to be turned away from the door of a church or, if they are already inside, to be asked to leave. Being one of the main historic attractions in the city to which the tourist office frequently directs parties of visitors, people can be disappointed if they want to see inside Riverstane on a Sunday around the times of morning and evening services. This was typified on one fieldwork occasion which, by way of illustration, is documented here from the researcher's perspective:

It is Sunday evening, and I arrive at Riverstane to find a large coach-load of European tourists crowding round the door. The elder on duty is explaining to their guide that, at certain hours on a Sunday, visitors are only admitted if they intend to stay for the service of worship. The anticipation of the tourists turns into heated disbelief, and they begin to remonstrate loudly and rapidly in Italian. Perhaps they are under the impression that the church is Roman and they do not expect to be turned away from the door. Noticing my arrival, they rush towards me with urgency, appealing for intervention. The office-bearer, courteous but resolute, remains silently on the step. Although aware of the practical reasons behind the rule, I express my sympathy with their position but disclose that I am not in authority. They leave, outraged, while the octogenarian elder and I together enter the large and virtually empty building.

This is an example of the type of situation in which the researcher occasionally had to make the ethical choice between acting, or not acting, according to personal outlook as an individual, while maintaining a participant role.

Informant C further comments on this door policy:

"It's got stricter more recently, and you're in trouble if you're on duty and you let them in." (C.1.a.iii.).

The office-bearer standing on the church steps was 'carrying out orders' in the sense that it is policy, for roughly the two-hour period around the time of morning and evening services, not to admit people such as tourists who would be there for reasons other than attending the service. It has happened, however, that someone genuinely intending to be at the service has been mistaken for a tourist and as a result prevented from getting into the building. One such person, regularly present at evening services, was not recognised because the office-bearer in question was less regular an attender.

Yet there are reasons for having this door policy. In the first place it would be impractical to have tourists walking through the building when services are in progress. This is different from continental Europe where in some churches it is more common for tourists to mill about continually, and so visitors from these countries might have similar expectations when they travel here. As one interviewee put it, "The foreigners don't bother about people coming and going in their churches" (E.1.b.iii.). But it is not generally compatible with Scottish custom in churches to have a level of background activity while services of worship are taking place. It is also the case that in the hour before services begin at Riverstane there are concentrated choir rehearsals taking place, and those involved find that, when visitors are walking around, the presence of spectators, as well as any noise, can be distracting. Further, there is a constant problem with security at the church, and the occasional thefts around the times of services would be grounds alone for restricting access as much as is practicable.

This cultural scene illustrates one way in which the particularities at Riverstane Church have an impact upon the relationships between outsiders and insiders, partly arising from the differential ways in which people relate to the

building. For some it is a public place to be visited, for others a private space to be guarded. As will be set out in later chapters, the key to understanding this is in terms of boundaries, which is an important theme in this thesis as it also has implications for the relationships between insiders.

The experience at the door described so far relates to that part which is essentially pre-liminal. Once across the threshold, the most immediate phenomenon inside the building to which interviewees refer is the welcome at the door. The following are some typical comments:

"An elder might be there to say 'Good morning' though you might not know who he is." (A.1.a.iv.).

"You see the elder at the door - sometimes he says 'Good morning'." (D.1.a.iii.).

"There's usually an elder at the door and if we know them we'll have a blether or just say 'Good morning' if we don't." (G.1.a.iii.).

"Sometimes there's an elder standing at the door. They're much more forthcoming than they used to be - they speak to you now." (H.1.a.ii.).

It has already been noted that some of the office-bearers on duty may not be among those who attend most frequently, and this is partly why congregants such as informant A might not always know who they are, some of whom are for various reasons mostly present only when it is their turn on the duty rota. Another factor relates to the social segmentation of the congregation, a theme that will be elaborated on below, whereby people in one circle may not generally know or speak to those in other circles. For example, one office-bearer comments:

"Certain individuals walk in and look neither to the left nor to the right. You hand them a hymn book and they do not even say good morning to you." (O.2.b.vii.).

Indeed, informant G above refers to not conversing with an elder if he is not known and, from informant H, the reverse has also been true, that the office-bearers might not be

disposed to speak with those who are outside of their circle.

These interviewees perceive the elder at the door as having the function of welcoming people. However, as was described above with regard to the door policy, the situation is more complex. This is reflected in the following comments which are also typical:

"An elder might see tourists coming in and go forward to stop them getting in...If they don't recognise someone as a member then they should speak to them...Instead the elders are turning people away." (N.1.a.ii.).

"[The leader of the elders' section] gave me a row last night when I was on duty for letting some tourists in - 'You know the rules as well as me,' he said." (C.2.a.i.).

"When I was on elder's duty and they asked me to go to the door and stop tourists coming in, I refused. I couldn't do that. To me, that isn't what the church is about...[One elder] put his foot on a push chair a woman came in with when he asked her if she was there for the service." (E.1.b.iii.4.a.1.).

"What really makes my blood boil is the elders turning tourists away. The front of the house is bad news...I try to get to the visitors first. It is the church after all. It's part of the church to welcome people. And here we are all supposed to be good Christians, not making people welcome." (P.1.a.iii.).

"There's a dividing line in Riverstane. Last Sunday I saw three bus-loads of tourists and they just got their nose in the door when it was a case of, 'You can come in if you care to join the service.' [Someone else] gets very troubled about that. The reply you get is that Historic Scotland is behind it...Whose house is it anyway? It's disturbing that these tourists are being turned out." (I.4.a.i.).

From these experiences around either side of the door there seems to be a mixture of ways in which the office-bearers relate to people entering the building, depending on whether or not they are tourists and, if congregants, whether or not they are known. There is also a mixture in what the interviewees were most aware of, with some focusing upon the welcoming function of the elder at the door and others upon

the apparent excluding function. Further, there is clearly a sense of dissonance associated with the cultural scene at the boundary or threshold of the church. While those who focus on the welcome at the door might be unaware of the element of exclusion, this would seem less likely, in which case their awareness of it is perhaps being suppressed.

Informants also express a sense of inward conflict in relation to the social processes within the congregation, and this will receive more detailed attention in later chapters in relation to micro-politics and status economics. As one interviewee commented in this connection, "The big thing that's going to come out of your study will be sheer frustration" (E.2.b.vi.). Others are less direct about this and, while it is possible that their perception is different, in which case it reflects the normal dissensus rather than consensus in the way people relate to congregational culture, there is the other possibility suggested by informant I:

"Unless people are closing their eyes to [social division], they can't help but see it - it's so blatant. Some people wrap themselves in a cocoon. Others shut their eyes because of their good nature, turning a blind eye because it isn't their way."
(I.1.a.vi.).

In other words, again, it is possible that some congregants who do not report a sense of dissonance in relation to the social segmentation might be suppressing their awareness.

Many do express a sense of dissonance, however, and they are among the most committed attenders at Riverstane. The significance of this is that their experience clearly does not prevent them returning to the church week by week. The salient question which follows from this is not so much as to what makes congregants such committed attenders, since all it would require to show is that the incentives for their motivation exceed any disincentives which might be present. These incentives relate to the benefits which congregants derive personally and individually from any

combination of factors involving the building, the music, the worship, religious satisfaction, spiritual comfort, the historical-traditional setting, continuity of personal association, the support of a social network, the sense of belonging. However, a more searching question concerns the cultural processes which lead the congregation as a community to suppress their collective discourse in such a way that they choose to allow sources of dissonance to remain. This matter will be considered further in the chapters ahead.

3. Going through the Church

Once past the door, people describe three basic trajectories through the fifty-yard length of the rectangular nave on the way to their seating places in the quire section of the church before the service begins. In the extracts below, each person has a different preferred trajectory while being aware of the other ones which people take:

"We go past the magazine table and the tea table, but we don't partake. Sometimes we sit for a minute or two if we're early or if there's somebody we know, though we wouldn't go up to people and intrude in their conversation. Usually, though, we just go straight in." (A.1.a.iv.).

"We pass the magazine stall and then we stop and have a coffee - it's for the early people only, because it's meant to be for after the service...Not all of them have tea or coffee before the service. People tend not to linger at the magazine table." (D.1.a.iv.b.ii.).

"We say hello on the way past the magazine table. Some people don't agree with having the coffee stall, but it tends to be the same people every week who gather there. We just go on to the middle of the nave." (H.1.a.iii.).

Again, these comments (from the same interviewees as before) refer to the tendency to restrict conversation to those who belong to the same social circle and so to be reticent about conversing with others. There is also the feature of congregants whose commitment involves arriving early and the distinction they have of being allowed tea or coffee before

the service begins. Others have the opportunity after the service, but there are some who for various reasons never "partake", partly because they disagree with it and partly because they belong to a separate social circle from those who do.

From these and other comments, it appears that congregants tend to be consistent in their choice of pathway through the church, illustrated by informant H in referring to "the same people every week who gather" at the coffee stall. As a result three basic categories of movement inside the building on a Sunday morning before the service can be identified, generally comprising the same people from week to week and corresponding to each of these three trajectories: 'stop and have a coffee', 'the middle of the nave', and 'straight in'. The magazine table and the coffee stall are separate but near to each other, and in effect constitute a single area, although the magazine table is less of a focus since the people who pause there do so only briefly. The middle of the nave tends to be the setting for a collection of separate clusters of people standing in pairs or in groups of three or more, with other people sitting on wicker chairs backing onto pillars, or who are seated along the length of the south wall. Those who go straight in generally make their way immediately to the elders handing out hymn books, and then enter the screened part of the church where the pews are, called the quire, for the service of worship.

The clusters seem to be governed by personal association and, although people may clearly belong to more than one cluster, crossover between them in terms of social interaction is relatively limited. Informant A above referred to the reluctance to "intrude" upon a conversation. The result is an ambience in the nave which is social but segmented. This segmentation is reflected in the way people might not know the names of some other congregants belonging

to a different cluster, even if they have known them by sight for years. It also restricts the ease with which people can speak to others from different clusters. The following comments illustrate this:

"It's a different atmosphere at Riverstane than it was at [a neighbouring church, now closed]. There was a smaller number of people who all knew each other - Riverstane has the same number except that there are more visitors...People aren't forthcoming - they don't approach you. Even people you know might not speak to you. You could be off for weeks before people would notice." (A.1.a.i.).

"People tend to talk just to people they know, and getting to know people is very hard...Some people you'll never get to know...There's an atmosphere - not welcoming - such as when people don't say, 'Good morning'. Elders especially. Some people just look at you as if to say, 'How do you know me?' and don't say 'Good morning,' back...When we started having coffee at first we were just left standing by ourselves - nobody spoke to us." (C.1.a.vi.vii.2.a.i.).

"[The coffee stall's] where the gossip is. It can feel awkward sometimes...In a normal church when new people come in you make them welcome. But not Riverstane. It's the funny people - they don't speak to folk. A few people circulate, but that's all. You need confidence to speak to them." (D.1.a.iv.2.a.i.).

"Some people are hard to get a conversation with. It's a wee bit embarrassing." (F.1.a.iv.).

"You stop with people you know." (G.1.a.v.).

"The atmosphere is not right. There's an ice barrier up." (I.5.a.iii.).

"It has taken a long time to get to know people's names...I say hello in the passing, but don't get into much of a conversation. You don't get to know people really well...I say hello if I know the elder...Some of the congregation are in with the bricks and they're less welcoming...People do look at you with unseeing eyes...It's taken me a long time to get to know people." (J.1.a.iii.iv.v.2.a.ix.b.i.3.a.iii.).

"You tend not to be approached by people at Riverstane...It's not like a normal church where there's warmth. The coldness is remarked upon by a lot of people of different ages...People don't really know each other." (K.1.b.ii.).

"Some people come out of habit and don't speak to people in the congregation." (N.2.a.vii.).

"You don't go to Riverstane to be matey with people. I think all that standing in the nave to have coffee is frightful, spilling it on the flagstones. That's not why I go to church...The fact there is coffee in the nave appeals to some people. It doesn't appeal to me. I never partake. People find it an opportunity for social mix. But quite frankly the nave is not the best place for that." (O.1.b.ii.2.c.ii.).

In these extracts, informant A contrasts the less welcoming social ambience at Riverstane with that of a former neighbouring congregation which had the same number of members attending. Significantly, reference is made to the greater proportion of visitors who augment the numbers at Riverstane and, as will be noted below, the social processes which have developed within the congregation are not independent of the presence of so many strangers week by week. Also, informant A refers to the phenomenon of not being spoken to by congregants even when they are known, and this indicates the social segmentation whereby people tend to restrict conversation to those who belong to the same circle and who would probably not notice it when those belonging to other circles might be absent from church. The same phenomena are variously refracted through the comments of the other interviewees, and it is important to note that in each case they were commenting independently of each other without being asked leading questions, so that the subject-matter raised was entirely of their own selection.

However, it would be an error to conclude from the above extracts that congregants at Riverstane are characteristically unfriendly. Taken in isolation, these comments might give such an impression on a first reading, but that would be to misinterpret the material since, paradoxically, several of those quoted above also comment positively upon the warmth of relationships they enjoy in the church:

"Most of them are very friendly. But you can go in and out there and nobody talks to you." (B.4.a.iii.).

"It's where people can have a blether, like in a church hall. Because people don't live beside each other and don't see people between times, they don't get the chance to talk otherwise...The people who gather by the coffee stall for a blether are the early people, and so tend to be the same ones every week. You can have a laugh." (D.1.a.iv.b.ii.).

"I like it when I see people coming in and having a natter. You get the chance to talk to people then." (E.1.a.ii.).

"There are lots of friendly people - people of the same generation. And it's nice when you get invited to take part in things and go to meetings...People in the church seem to be unapproachable, but they aren't really." (J.2.a.ix.3.a.ii.).

"There's people there we like to see and speak to - it's often difficult to catch people after the service. You meet up with people you're associated with." (L.1.a.iii.).

"As well as speaking a few words with folk, there are conversations too. People telling the stories of their experiences and catching up with their news. If you haven't been out people ask how you are...I've made more friends at Riverstane and I've been happier there than anywhere else." (N.1.a.iii.iv.).

Informant D refers to the gathered nature of the congregation as a factor in the social segmentation, since people tend to gravitate to others in their own circle whom they may not have seen since the previous week, such as the people at the coffee stall who "tend to be the same ones every week." The reference to 'having a laugh' reflects the degree to which congregants are relaxed within their own circle, in contrast to when they are in other situations in the church. Informant J refers to the affinity between people of the same generation, which reflects not only the lack of an intergenerational range within social circles but also across the congregation as a whole. Also, informant L confirms that personal association governs the matter of who speaks with whom in the congregation. In the extract from

informant B, the two sentences might appear to be contradictory, but when the same informants speak in strong terms both of friendliness and unfriendliness they are not being inconsistent. Their accounts reflect the segmentation of congregants which is visible on a Sunday morning before and after the service. It is not that the people necessarily distribute themselves through the building in clusters which are tightly gathered in a physical respect. Rather it is their conceptualisation of who belongs to which social circle that is sharply focused.

After the service, when the clusters are most pronounced once again the corresponding trajectories are: straight out, middle of the nave, and around the coffee stall:

"After the service people tend to talk just to people they know, and getting to know people is very hard." (D.1.a.vi.).

"You get the people who beetle off in a hurry. Now the coffee stall gives people the opportunity to talk to each other." (F.2.a.ii.).

"After the service you only linger for a short space of time - people have places to go." (J.1.a.iv.).

"After the service...I chat to people while making my way out...Then in the nave I'll talk with the ones I know better for just a few minutes. I don't stop at the coffee stall and I'm out five minutes after the service finishes. People are getting out maybe to catch a bus, so we don't hold each other up. Maybe it's a bit selfish, but you have your routine." (K.1.a.iv.).

"You get an affinity with the people you see every Sunday where you sit. But it's difficult to speak to people after the service because they're preoccupied with other people or just go straight out at the end." (L.1.a.v.b.i.).

"You go to the service, stay for it, and then go out at the end." (O.1.b.ii.).

Clearly the interactions after the service reflect the same pattern as those before the service. At Riverstane the

extent to which congregants mix is limited and again this relates to the gathered nature of the congregation, partly in terms of its social segmentation but also on account of the practicalities of travelling to and from church. Informants J and K both refer to the need of some congregants to be getting on their way immediately after the service, especially where they depend upon the reduced public transport on a Sunday.

As a result of the limited interaction among those who do remain behind after the service, there are implications for the degree to which the congregation is bonded as a community. The following comments suggest that congregants are aware of some exclusivity in the social composition of clusters which form before and especially after the service:

"I don't want to use the word 'clique'...The way things come out can be awkward. Sometimes you find out later about things which have since passed, things which the stuck-up folk were at." (A.1.a.ii.).

"Some of the big noises seem to have got in - maybe money's got something to do with it." (B.4.a.iii.).

"The top notch - the well off - tend to side right away with that crowd [those who are difficult to get to know], although there are exceptions who can break away. It's a different class, though." (C.1.a.vi.).

"Maybe like people just gravitate to each other. Professional person and professional person. Not many people can have a foot in different camps." (E.3.a.iv.).

"The congregation is divided into three - the snobs or monied people, plain folk, and the sucker-uppers." (I.1.a.ii.).

"The high heid-yins [those who are at the head of the social hierarchy] are a bit stuffy...It's a class thing. Cliquey...It's definitely not right, the snooty element - but it's the professional class of people and it follows like night from day." (J.2.a.ix.b.i.).

"The people are reserved at Riverstane. They're very mannerly. But you'd never dream of making a joke with them in case they looked through you. It's a higher social level - people who've held elevated positions in their lives...There's not so many of them now. I used

to think Riverstane was stuck-up. It is a bit stuck-up but there's not so many of them now. They don't want to associate with folk other than themselves." (K.1.a.vi.).

"There's a great range of intelligence, skills, and social class...People make alliances - partly out of social class and intellectual and professional association. But whatever its demerits, Riverstane is not a one class place." (O.2.b.vii.c.i.).

"It's very chatty in the nave - if you're in the know." (P.1.a.vii.).

Informant A refers to a phenomenon at Riverstane concerning the flow of information, whereby people might learn about things by default rather than being told directly, including some social occasions and certain decisions which have been taken. On a previous point with regard to being relaxed in the company of affines, informant K refers to "not making a joke" with others who are outwith the social circle "in case they looked through you." This is reminiscent of the "unseeing eyes" mentioned by informant J in an earlier citation with regard to those who are "in with the bricks", and relates to the common theme in the above extracts in connection with congregants from higher social strata. Historically, Riverstane was associated with upper socioeconomic classes to a degree which is no longer quite the case. Informants E and J refer to "professional" people, while informant K puts it in terms of "people who've held elevated positions in their lives...but there's not so many of them now." Informants E, F, and G enlarge on this:

"There's a tier system in the congregation. There used to be professors, accountants, industrialists, there used to be a car show outside the church, but not so much now. I haven't seen a Rolls-Royce out there for a long time...A lot of [parish] people in the past were driven out because of the way it was in Riverstane. Deliberate or otherwise - who can tell?" (E.1.b.iv.2.b.iii.).

"People with Rolls-Royces. You kept away from the snobs - there were enough of the others who accepted you. It doesn't happen now to the same degree, but there's still one or two snobs." (F.1.a.iv.).

"People have always thought Riverstane is for well-off people - very up-market...There were snobs before, all right. The upper class, they wouldn't look the road you were on." (G.1.a.iv.).

The significance of this is that while the presence of such a socioeconomic elite is no longer quite as it was, the memory of it is strong, particularly among those who have been there longest, and its effect upon the present is a significant feature of the horizon at Riverstane Church.

A final point here is that given the pattern of interaction among congregants, whereby the degree to which they mix with each other is limited, there is little prospect for visitors to be adequately welcomed. As a result of the social segmentation among insiders at Riverstane, any outsiders tend to be left in a typically isolated position:

"You get a lot of people who are very obviously visitors. I'm sure in general that people speak to them...If you're a stranger you have to make the first move - so how can you be a part of things?" (J.1.a.vi.2.b.i.).

"People can be left standing on their own." (K.1.b.i.).

"Then there's the attitude to people coming in and to visitors. There's something missing." (M.2.a.v.).

"On Sunday morning a young couple came into church with a rucksack - they looked like students or tourists - and one of the 'high' ladies leaned over to me and said, 'What are we coming to when they're coming into church like that?'" (I.5.a.vi.).

"When the [neighbouring church, now closed] people came in, some of the Riverstane people didn't like it - there was very strong feeling among some of the older ones." (N.3.b.iv.).

"It's as if I'm the designated 'poor person correspondent'. Outsiders are...retaliated against - physically ejected. It's like a terrible infection is coming in from the outside. There's absolutely no tolerance of anyone who is foreign - including foreigners. There's one or two who are token, but they're not going to be around for long. As long as they know their place. They're just ignored. I'm very wary now of getting involved - they get so little human contact I'm afraid they'll latch on. It's the same with anyone who is different at all...The number of

excuses I get from people for not showing an interest in people. It comes down to the social level." (T.1.a.iv.v.b.iv.).

Informant K refers to the phenomenon of outsiders being "left standing" alone. While congregants in the nave generally arrange themselves in clusters, others are noticeably isolated in the spaces between. Informant J describes such people as being "very obviously visitors." Also, when informant J adds, "I'm sure in general that people speak to them," the force of the statement is that surely at least somebody will to speak to them. This is attested by informant T who is used to the position of being informally delegated with the task of speaking to strangers, thereby relieving others of the burden. Further, there are congregants at Riverstane who are themselves in a relatively marginalised position and are also by default left to speak to visitors. As a result, these 'problem' congregants can tend to impose themselves on the strangers whose politeness and isolated position can leave them vulnerable. Informant I makes an important comment in referring to someone else, who reports a sense of alienation because of the presence of outsiders whose appearance challenges her understanding of what it means to be in church. Accordingly, as noted earlier, the marked degree to which Riverstane is occupied by strangers through religious tourism as well as civic and other public occasions leads to a strengthening of the boundaries between insiders and outsiders, so that it becomes correspondingly difficult to assimilate them. Lastly, informant N refers to the closure of a neighbouring church, and the subsequent difficulty with which Riverstane assimilated the very few congregants who made the transition between them. On this point, informant F comments:

"All the members of the [neighbouring church] should have been contacted and asked where they were going to continue their membership. I mentioned it at the session meeting, but anything I mention there is like water off a duck's back - it doesn't get taken seriously." (F.5.b.i.).

There is, then, something of a resistance to outsiders at Riverstane Church, and resistance to outside influences is concomitant with resistance to change. Accordingly, there has been little change at Riverstane over the period of a generation. One occasional attender who is not a member of the congregation remarked that Riverstane is "stuck somewhere in the 1950s." Informant F also comments on this:

"A lot of things haven't changed [in the past thirty years]. The service hasn't changed...Eventually change will come, but you've got to wait for change. You can't want change on the Monday and expect it to happen. It's a gradual process, people accepting your ideas...They want everything to stay the same, but that's impossible. That's the problem with this business of change...If only [another congregant, now lapsed] had realised that's the way things are in Riverstane. If she had the patience to wait, things will have to change and it won't be long now. It's a pity she couldn't accept the slow change."
(F.2.b.iii.5.a.v.b.ii.iv.).

Such resistance towards outsiders combined with resistance to change as "the way things are in Riverstane" has the effect of what Tom Allan refers to as 'chilling out' newcomers to the congregation (1984: 34).

Conclusion

The cultural scenes described in this chapter have introduced themes of social segmentation, boundaries, and conflict. These will be considered further in the chapters ahead in terms of the relationships between insiders and outsiders, as well as the relationships between insiders themselves through the social processes of the congregation.

While the congregation is socially segmented, it is also held together by commitment to symbols of tradition. The next chapter considers this with regard to the Sunday morning service of worship. Then, in Chapter Seven, the other main cultural scene to be considered takes the kirk session as a paradigm of the many committees at Riverstane.

Symbols of Riverstane: Tradition and Construction
of a Collective Sense of Self

Introduction

In Part Two so far, there have been two stages in the unfolding ethnography of Riverstane Church. Details of fieldwork were set out in Chapter Four, and Chapter Five presented material drawn from ethnographic interviews and participant observation in connection with the cultural scenes at Sunday morning gatherings before and after the service of worship. This chapter now seeks to thicken the ethnographic description further by discussing the emphasis upon tradition in the commitment system at Riverstane through which the congregation constructs a collective sense of self. The first part of the chapter describes aspects of symbolism at Riverstane in relation to the building and the services of worship, and the second part considers the self-presentation of the church in its public profile.

In the previous chapter it was noted on page 181 above that to share in what Peter Stromberg (1986) refers to as the 'commitment system' of the congregation partly involves, at Riverstane, being a solid attender Sunday by Sunday. For some it also involves arriving significantly earlier than others and staying behind significantly later. However, there are other expressions of commitment apart from this, such as involvement in the society of friends of Riverstane (a para-church organisation which promotes public interest in the building), volunteer guiding for tourists on weekdays, serving on committees (such as music, flowers, linen and fabric, the magazine, to name a few), helping at the 'not quite new' shop, being at monthly meetings of church organisations, and paying pew rents.

However, across the congregation as a whole, commitment is not generally conceived in terms of attending Sunday evening services, or the daily prayer services at noon on weekdays, or the minor communion services held periodically throughout the year. Apart from involvement in the various activities mentioned before, some congregants might otherwise express commitment by making generous donations to the church in response to the intermittent financial appeals. These range from massive campaigns, of which there have been two in the space of five years (reaching targets of £350,000 and £380,000), to the biannual fundraising drives, requests for Christmas gifts of money, and occasional appeals when the church intends to make a special purchase of some kind (such as replacement hymn books or chairs). Referring to particular members at Riverstane in a former era, informant O comments, "If money was needed for something, then people...would just write a cheque." (O.1.b.v.).

What these various forms of commitment represent is attachment to the traditions of congregational life. Although, as described in the previous chapter, there is a marked degree of social segmentation at Riverstane, the congregation is nevertheless held together in their shared attachment to the symbols around which they gather. However, this is not to say that their culture is reduced to a matter of consensus. So, for example, on the matter of paying pew rents, informant F comments: "I'm not a supporter of seat letting - that's an out of date Victorian system. The church should endeavour to be modern and not looking backwards to the Victorians." (F.1.b.ii.). Sharing in the commitment system means different things to different people. Stromberg comments (1986: 12):

I question whether the existence or appearance of consensus is of importance for understanding how a commitment system may work to hold a social group together.

This is not to say that where people have a shared outlook it is culturally unimportant, but rather that where something does not appear to 'fit' it can be the clue to a somewhat greater complexity. An example of this was noted in Chapter Five (on page 192 above) regarding the way interviewees might comment on the friendliness and also on the unfriendliness of congregants. Informants might even refer to both features at the same time. But rather than focusing on either one against the other, taking them both together leads to a more adequate picture of social segmentation within the congregation.

Such cultural differentiability means that congregants can gather round the same symbols while relating to them in different ways. Stromberg comments on this with regard to the Swedish congregation at Immanuelskyrkan in Stockholm (1986: 11):

I found little agreement or discernible consensus on even the fundamental symbols of faith. Of course, most members shared a great deal in terms of their attitudes and beliefs, but I found that it was not possible to specify exactly the boundaries of that sharing. There were always exceptions and subtle shades of difference among the church members.

Stromberg's study focuses on how congregants relate to symbols of faith. By contrast, for reasons that were described in Chapter Four (on pages 163-164 above), the research presented here focuses not just on what people say about symbolic features of Riverstane Church but also on what they do, that is, how these are reflected in the social processes of the congregation. What lies behind the various expressions of commitment at Riverstane described above is more than anything else a fundamental commitment to the longstanding traditions of its corporate life. Although, unlike Stromberg's approach, interviewees were not specifically asked about their personal faith, some did indeed refer to this, but more typically people commented on matters of tradition in the congregation, which is the topic of the first part of the chapter.

I. Riverstane Church and its Symbols

The question arises as to what there might be in the life of the congregation that can be regarded as symbolic. While some symbolism might be immediately apparent in the form of flags or insignia, less obvious items such as a piece of bread in a communion service are also symbolic. However, it is essential to realise there is equally important symbolism beyond the realm of the religious and the visible. Anthony Cohen notes that "the community itself and everything within it, conceptual as well as material, has a symbolic dimension" (1985: 19). In particular, this embraces the unexceptional routine of ordinary life in the community, behind which "there is a realm of meta-meaning whose components...[are] called 'symbolic'" (1987: 19). As a result, some symbolic material may well be in the form of intangible mental constructs: "Most symbols do not have visual or physical expression but are, rather, ideas" (1985: 18). One example of this is in the symbolic boundaries of the congregation, a theme that will be of major importance for this ethnography and will be considered in the next chapter.

1. Christian Symbols

The tangible symbols at Riverstane fall into two broad categories: symbols which relate specifically to the Christian faith, and other symbols of a more general nature. It should not be overlooked that in common with other congregations there are religious symbols which mark the church out as being part of the Christian tradition. The fact of their presence is not in itself significant, since Christian churches in general hold such symbols in common to a greater or lesser degree. What does have salience is the way in which a congregation relates to its Christian symbols. In what follows, it will become apparent that at Riverstane the building contains rich symbolism, but it is

also being suggested that in personally appropriating it, congregants need not necessarily grasp the content of the symbolism in terms of its Christian tradition.

At Riverstane the tangible symbolism includes the seven-foot tall ornate wooden cross which is mounted seven feet above the floor on the central pillar towards the east end of the main worship space known as the quire. On the line of sight below the cross is the centrepiece of the chancel area that is the substantial and elaborately carved communion table. As well as the special occasions for which it is designed, this functions as the surface on which the offering plates are laid ceremonially as part of the Sunday services. Given that the table stands for the sacrament of communion, it also functions as a symbol of a symbol since the bread and wine associated with it are themselves symbolic. The front of the table features a carving of the scene at the last supper, a representation in which the chalice held by the figure of Christ is painted in gold. Perhaps not by coincidence, a gold chalice is part of the communion ware on the five main communion services of the year (Christmas Day, Easter Day, Pentecost, and dates in March and October), from which only ministers and some elders drink.

As well as the bread and wine at communions, the water sprinkled at baptisms is another ordinary commodity which has symbolic content. However, in contrast to the impressive communion table, there is no corresponding fixture in the chancel area representing the baptismal sacrament. Instead, on these occasions a special bowl is placed on a portable stand. This relatively makeshift arrangement is consistent with the less than prominent role of the rite of baptism at Riverstane. Informant A thought it "a pity they don't have a font there." (A.2.a.viii.). In contrast to this, another commented: "What does it matter if it's a permanent font or not? The words are said and the water's there, and what else do you want?" (N.4.a.iv.).

There is indeed a large, marble baptismal font in the nave at the opposite end of the church, beside the door, but this is ornamental rather than functional and was last used over seventy years ago. However, of the fourteen or so baptisms which take place in a year, these rarely involve children coming directly from the congregation, of which there are hardly any. On this point informant N added: "Of course, we don't have the children." (N.4.a.iv.). While a parent might be the son or daughter of existing members, in practice the families bringing children for baptism tend not to be attenders even if they have an association with Riverstane, which often is not the case, and virtually without exception they do not come back to the church. Informant F comments:

"There's a lot more christenings, though - that used to be a rare event. And these are people who aren't in the habit of going to church - I can tell they aren't familiar with the ritual in the church by the way they conduct themselves." (F.2.b.iii.).

Another said: "People shouldn't be getting their children baptised when they're not members. You know you'll never see them again." (H.4.a.i.).

Other visible items of Christian symbolism located in the chancel area include ornate crosses and designs based on the letters 'IHS', from the Greek abbreviation for 'Jesus', engraved in wood or embroidered on the communion table covers, on pulpit falls, and on Bible place markers, which are liturgically coloured (white, red, green, purple) for use at different seasons in the Christian year. Further concrete symbolism in the chancel relates to the large Bible on the lectern, although not in a ceremonial sense. At Riverstane the Bible is brought out informally before the service begins. One interviewee commented: "The wee man slips in with the Bible beforehand...It's not part of the service but it should be." (B.2.a.iii.). Another said: "When the Bible comes in it's not noticed. It's not part of the service." (D.4.1.ii.). Unlike some other churches where the congregation stands when the Bible is carried in or out,

at Riverstane the congregation stands when the offering is brought forward and also when the minister walks up or down the centre aisle. However, on this point one informant commented: "We're standing for the word of God, not for the ministers" (A.2.a.ii.), and again this reflects a differentiability in the way people relate to elements of symbolism. As with the communion table, the lectern is a symbol of a symbol. The wood is carved in the form of an eagle and this is in turn a symbol of the fourth evangelist, the fourth gospel being the one which is associated with the identification of Christ as the logos, that is, the 'word'. In that sense, the lectern can be seen as the symbol of a symbol of a symbol.

Far above the worship space of the quire, the vaulted wooden ceiling has a series of large, colourfully painted, central bosses featuring carvings of biblical symbolism. These include, for example, the Greek letters alpha and omega, a reference to Christ as the beginning and the end (Revelation 22.13), and the image of a lamb, a reference to Christ as the sacrificial lamb of God (John 1.29). The walls framing the quire have colourful stained glass windows, also depicting biblical imagery, contrasting with the greyness of the stone. The four main windows extending to ceiling height on the wall behind the chancel represent the four evangelists. Behind that, and lower on the wall at the east of the quire, four windows illustrate scenes from the gospel story, of the nativity, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Other windows portray the story of creation, Adam and Eve, various Bible characters, and saints of early celtic Christianity, as well as having intricate designs incorporating a variety of Christian symbols.

The significance of the religious symbolism described above is that it encodes Christian tradition with such a density that might not be accessible to many congregants. The superabundance of symbolism is such that it may overwhelm

some congregants' awareness. Although specifically referring to the lack of visual interest in the services of worship, it is notable that informant E can say, "As a Protestant church we don't have so much to look at." (E.5.a.v.). Apart from matters of aesthetics, their appreciation of these symbols will depend upon knowledge of the Bible and Christian iconography. Religious meanings are locked within the symbols but, in a church which lacks a programme of Christian education, their content may not be readily understood by many in the congregation. As informant L comments, "A lot of people don't have an understanding of Christianity." (L.3.a.v.). With regard to the robes worn by the minister, informant E comments, "They don't understand what half the things he wears mean." (E.5.a.v.). While they might well appropriate such symbolism in personal ways, the degree to which the meanings they construct have continuity with Christian tradition is likely to vary. This is reflected too in the differential ways people relate to the services of worship, as will be described later. Although it is not necessary for congregants fully to understand symbols before they can appropriate them, the extent to which Christian symbols contribute to their collective sense of self any more than other types of symbols remains an open question.

2. Other Symbolism

The tangible symbolism in the building is not all specifically Christian. Some of the stained glass windows commemorate people and institutions more generally, even if they bear the appended subscript 'to the glory of God'. As one interviewee commented: "The stained glass doesn't have so many of the Bible stories to add to the atmosphere. It's more historical." (P.1.a.vi.). An example of this is in a window depicting two of the ancient Scottish monarchs, but which in fact was donated in memory of other persons whose names are incorporated in the design. The same manner of

commemoration is repeated in windows throughout the building. Two particularly impressive examples are taken up with the guild of trades and the guild of merchants in the city. Further examples are windows for the masonic order, the air force, and the navy.

Other institutional symbolism is seen in a regimental book of remembrance which is displayed in the chancel on a stand placed symmetrically across from the Bible lectern. Also, the design on the chancel carpet incorporates the city's emblems together with a representation of the biblical image of the burning bush (Exodus 3.2), which is an emblem of the Church of Scotland. The chi-rho symbol, from the Greek abbreviation for 'Christ', is also featured in the carpet design. Wooden chairs in the chancel bear engravings of animals from the poems of Robert Burns. Next to the chancel are two decorative chairs featuring the badges of the present monarch and prince consort, should the occasion arise, which has happened a few times, and indeed avowed allegiance to and defence of royalty is one of the most dominant symbolic traditions at Riverstane. Then there are the dozens of plaques, insignia, and coats of arms of many organisations affixed to the sides of pews and along the walls, plus the various regimental colours, war memorials, and individual memorials along the walls throughout the building.

The actual church building, as was noted in the previous chapter (on page 172), is itself a powerful symbol to which people relate differentially. It was noted that some outsiders take it to be a Roman church, and others Episcopalian, rather than Presbyterian. Some in the Roman tradition see it as monument to what has been lost and which some day might be regained. Some in the Protestant community see it as a monument to what the Reformation was supposed to be against. Some take it to be a tourist attraction or a museum rather than a functioning place of

worship. Some take it to be an architectural treasure, and some an architectural offence because of its blackened stone. In this connection, in March 1996 a national newspaper carried the following letter written by a member of the public who is not connected with Riverstane:

The millenium is only four years away, yet Riverstane Church is as dirty and soot-blackened as it was at the end of the Industrial Revolution. There could be no more fitting memorial to the last 2000 years than a newly-cleaned Riverstane with its honey-coloured stone glowing in the sunshine above the old [river]...Get the experts together, agree a technique, apply for cash from the Millenium Fund, and get cleaning!

What makes this letter significant, and other often heard comments like it, is not the fact that the writer is uninformed about experts who have indeed investigated the matter, concluding that the stone is protected by its patina and if cleaned would not only be damaged but would reveal an unsightly appearance. Rather, the significance lies in the symbolic impact of the building to prompt such letters from members of the public at all in a national newspaper.

The symbolism in the building (Christian and other) and the symbolism of the building, while being separate, are related to each other in that they combine to express a profound emphasis at Riverstane upon matters of tradition. The traditions in question might relate variously to religion, institutions, architecture, history, or music, and congregants relate to these differentially. The very word 'tradition' is itself a powerful term in the rhetoric of the congregation, and indeed can be invoked to legitimise decisions or practice. Informant I comments on this: "People will say it's the 'tradition'...Again we bring out this word 'tradition'." (I.3.a.i.5.a.iv.).

With regard to the church building itself, congregants typically report a strong sense of attachment to it as a symbol:

"When we joined, the building was part of it. I know it shouldn't be." (A.4.a.ii.).

"People are overawed by the building and afraid to show their feelings. Some people can't take the atmosphere." (D.2.a.ii.).

"The building is just a building, but a lot of people are proud of their Riverstane building." (I.2.a.vii.).

"I take in the ambience of the place - it's peaceful... The building is special - the windows, the height, the grandeur." (J.1.a.vi.).

"The beauty of the building has a lot to commend it...People's loyalty is to Riverstane and not to people. It's what Riverstane stands for. You're very much aware of the continuity of religious service. In that sense we're very, very lucky. And when you think of the historic events that would not have happened anywhere else - like royal occasions - it's a very enriching experience." (O.2.b.vii.c.vi.).

"What drew me to Riverstane was the atmosphere, the drama, the traditionalism. Which doesn't suit everybody. Like the elders in their tail suits...The building itself lends atmosphere - an atmosphere of dignity, of prayer, of feeling at home. The colour of the stone often comes up. It would be a shame if it were cleaned up - it's absorbed the patina of the city's history." (P.1.a.ii.vi.).

Informant A acknowledges that the building was an attraction but adds, "I know it shouldn't be," a view expressed by informant I in the words, "The building is just a building." The implication is that while there is more to a church than its architecture, it nevertheless has a heightened importance to congregants at Riverstane, even though the building is not in their ownership. Informant O puts this more forcefully: "People's loyalty is to Riverstane and not to people," referring not just to the building but to its symbolic representation of the various traditions which it "stands for." Informants D, J, and P draw attention to the evocative atmosphere or ambience of the interior. Further, informant P refers to the "traditionalism" as an attraction, and this applies to matters such as the elders' uniform of black tails and striped trousers. Significantly, this is a tradition "which doesn't suit everybody." That is, again, congregants relate to the traditions differentially.

Given the highly symbolic quality of the various traditions in the commitment system at Riverstane Church, and since these form the material out of which congregants construct meaning and a collective sense of self, it would seem probable that they would behave defensively towards them. In this connection, Stromberg writes (1985: 13):

Commitment to a proposition or a symbol of any kind entails a relationship between symbol and person...for the symbol to which one is committed does not only represent. In the relation of commitment, the symbol blends with experience...the blending of symbol with experience means that the symbol takes on the features of the self. One feels a relation to the symbol that is so close that a threat to the symbol is likely to be felt as a threat to the self...people may share commitments without sharing beliefs; it follows that they may constitute a community without that community being based in consensus.

A sense of being defensive towards, for example, the musical and historical tradition at Riverstane is such that congregants were motivated to raise a great deal of money for the renovation of the antique church organ in case it should break down (noted on page 175 above). The defensive outlook also sheds some light on the lack of openness to outsiders (described on pages 195-197 above) insofar as they might pose some potential threat to the symbolic traditions and the collective sense of self. This is a theme that will be returned to in the next chapter in relation to boundaries (on page 257 below).

C. Church Services

The symbolism described so far, Christian and other, has essentially been in relation to objects as representations of tradition. But every Sunday morning there is a wealth of Christian symbolism contained in the activity of worship through the readings from scripture, as well as prayers, sermons, creeds, hymns, psalms, and anthems. The various canticles sung by the choir, the magnificat (Luke 1.46-55), nunc dimittis (Luke 2.29-32), te deum, jubilate (Psalm 100), and benedictus (Luke 1: 68-79), are oral presentations

recounting biblical salvation history. Congregants strongly value the dignity of the highly formal services of worship, each component of which has a symbolic dimension. As informant O comments, "Many people appreciate the dignity of the service. The seemliness of the service...It's dignified without being burdensome." (O.2.b.vi.).

From the ethnographic interviews, once again congregants evidently appreciate the traditions of the worship in differential ways. In this final section of the first part of the chapter, extracts from the ethnographic interviews will be adduced in connection with various aspects of the Sunday morning service. The first selection below relates to its musical content:

"Sometimes the hymns are good, sometimes they're not. The variety could be better. I won't sing it if I don't like the tune. They should go for the congregation, not for the choir. The hymns should correspond with the theme. You should always get some that are cheery - some Sundays you can get them all dreich [dreary]...When the choir sings the magnificat it can be awful long and sometimes there's a long anthem too." (A.2.a.v.viii.).

"I like the hymns. Everybody else complains about them, but we take the music hymn book. [The minister] isn't bothering if you don't know the hymns." (D.4.a.iv.).

"A lot of people are like myself - very musical but can't read a note of it. When you hear a piece of music you like, it beats a sermon. More people will get more out of that than anything else in the whole service of worship...Unless it's a hymn I know, I'm not too happy. Sometimes I wonder where they get them." (E.5.a.ii.).

"The congregational singing is very poor. It's not so bad if it's a tune that's familiar and you can join in...It astonishes me that they stand staring at the hymn book and never seem to know the words...[The minister] doesn't sing them either." (G.3.a.v.).

"At the choir piece if you're musically inclined you follow it. But the people round about go by whether it's a long one or a short one...People don't relate to it. But you take it as part of the service. If it's a psalm, sometimes people turn it up in the hymn

book...The anthem is sometimes high-falutin' [bombastic]." (H.4.a.i.).

"When we first joined Riverstane it was for the music...I find God in the music." (I.2.a.vii.).

"I find it boring sometimes. I find the music a bit highbrow. I like the old hymns, not the ones meant for choirs. At baptisms I miss singing the blessing. It would be nice if the congregation sang it and not the choir. The music sometimes doesn't fit in with the ambience...We all ought to know what the procedure is, but there's a lot we don't know. The bit the choir sings - I don't know what it's about or where it's from. If it's a prose psalm then I'll look it up and follow it - it's the only way you can make out the words. When the choir sings it takes me a long time to work out what they're saying. It's a bit highbrow. Sometimes the sound is lovely, sometimes it's ghastly. But it's meaningless to me if I can't understand the words. From a religious, spiritual standpoint, that's alien to me." (J.2.a.vii.4.a.iv.).

"The choir music can be very beautiful. That was partly why I joined Riverstane. And I enjoyed the sermons...When the choir sings there's not a great deal of noticeable reaction. Some folk are obviously tuning out. Some go into a wee dream." (K.2.a.iv.vi.).

"I enjoy the choir singing, but I don't understand highbrow music. To me the choir is very good. Sometimes the anthem is something you know, and I like that." (N.4.a.i.).

"I enjoy the music, although I don't think it's as good as it ought to be" (O.2.b.v.).

Although informant A begins on the theme of likes and dislikes, what is being expressed is the inability to relate to music which is "for the choir" rather than the congregation, and this is stated directly by informant H: "People don't relate to it." Informant J refers to music which is "meant for choirs." Terms used to describe it are "high-falutin'" (informant H) and "highbrow" (informants J and N). On the other hand, for others the music is an attraction, and for informants I and K it was a reason for becoming members at Riverstane. Informant E comments that "more people will get more out of that than anything else in the whole service." While informants N and O speak of enjoying the music, and informant K describes it as being

"very beautiful", informant I goes further in being able to "find God in the music." Significantly, informant J admits to not knowing "what it's about or where it's from," and even when "the sound is lovely,...it's meaningless" if the words are unknown. As a result, "from a religious, spiritual standpoint," the choral music is "alien." When informant K refers to a lack of noticeable reaction to the music among congregants, this is not necessarily related to the music since the congregation is relatively unresponsive in general during services of worship. This is partly due to the ambience of the sanctuary, to which informant D alluded in an earlier connection: "People are overawed by the building and afraid to show their feelings." (D.2.a.ii.). Inhibition also extends to the hymn singing, and congregants account for this in the unfamiliarity of hymn tunes. Informant A "won't sing" some tunes. Informant E is "not too happy" unless the hymn is familiar. According to informant G, congregants "stand staring at the hymn book and never seem to know the words," and the minister "doesn't sing them either." Others who are more musically literate, however, such as informant D, do "like the hymns."

With regard to musical tradition, then, whether choral or congregational, there is a diversity in the ways people relate to it. The next selection of extracts relate to prayers and readings:

"If the prayers aren't too long your attention doesn't wander. If you're brought up in the church then you're used to the language - you accept that's how things are said." (B.2.a.vi.).

"You can tune into the prayer of intercession if it's not too long. It's the same with the offering - the prayer can go on and on as if it's another sermon." (H.4.a.i.).

"The preamble at the beginning of the prayer is a bit airy-fairy. I don't know what that's all about - it's meaningless. A lot of people bow their heads at that point as if it's a prayer, but I don't. I don't mind a bit of ceremonial, but not that. It's over most people's heads." (J.4.a.iii.).

"There are certain prayers when [one of the ministers] and one or two others give a reply. I was never brought up with that. I don't know why [one of the ministers] isn't following the catholic faith." (N.4.a.v.).

"When we went at the beginning it was the common thing to take your Bible to church and open it. It's a sign of how things have changed. I wouldn't dream of doing it now. Probably the people don't read the Bible." (G.4.a.iii.).

"I got out of the habit of taking my Bible to church for the reading when they used a different version. There's more meaning to it when you're reading it at the same time as hearing it." (H.2.a.vii.).

"When the minister announces the reading nobody has a Bible to open and follow it. We've got somebody else to read it for us and it's a lazy way of getting God's message." (I.5.a.i.).

"Sometimes you don't make out the readings, sometimes you do." (J.4.a.v.).

With regard to prayers, when informant B comments on being "used to the language," this is a reference to the usage, in all the prayers at Riverstane, of 'thou' and 'thee' as personal pronouns in the nominative and accusative cases for addressing God, together with '-est' and '-eth' as second and third person verb endings, and other conjugations such as 'art' (are), 'hast' and 'hath' (has), 'dost' and 'doth' (does). Significantly, commitment to this aspect of the worship tradition is to "accept that's how things are said." In connection with the length of prayers, informants B and H refer to the limits of "attention" or of being able to "tune" in. That is, the degree to which congregants can relate to the prayers depends on their form as well as any matters of content, which according to informant J can sometimes be "over most people's heads." An aspect of content which informants seem to take for granted as a tradition is the petition for the monarch and royal family during the prayers of intercession every Sunday. On the matter of form, informant N expresses an inability to relate to the tradition of responsive prayers, while others can.

With regard to the Bible, once more the ability of congregants to relate to readings has a differential quality. Informant G doubts whether people read the Bible at all, and informant H associates its meaningfulness with being able to follow the text on the page while hearing it. Ironically, when the lectern Bible was changed in recent years from the Authorised Version to the Revised Standard Version, presumably to make the readings more accessible, it meant that informant H no longer took his copy of the Authorised Version to church. In any case, according to informant J, "Sometimes you don't make out the readings." For informant I, not having "a Bible to open and follow" the readings constitutes a lack of commitment to this aspect of tradition.

So far, it has been seen that congregants relate in different ways to the tradition of worship at Riverstane, regarding music, prayers, and the Bible. The following extracts are concerned with the sermons:

"During the sermon you stay with it if it's short, but they can go on and on...As long as ministers don't go on about their holidays - we all go on our holidays. We don't want to listen to that...That's not what they're there for - they're meant to minister the word to the congregation...And you like to get a wee laugh, though sometimes it comes and goes before you notice. But I can't remember what the sermons are about."
(A.3.a.i.).

"It's quite nice to hear about things you don't do yourself...Sometimes you get quotes if he's read a book, or he reads wee poems...The sermon is just part and parcel of your hour's worship - the other things in the service are just as important as the sermon...Sometimes you don't always catch what [the minister] is saying - you can miss out on some of his words. But you can listen to his voice."
(B.3.a.i.ii.iii).

"During the service people are afraid even to laugh...There's a lot of name-dropping in the sermons...and being invited here and there, and that's all right for him but the rest of us want to hear about the Bible. That's why we're there." (D.2.a.ii.5.a.i.).

"Sometimes when [the minister] is preaching I look round the church and wonder who the hell he's talking to." (E.4.b.ii.).

"Sometimes you have to ask yourself what was in the sermon that came out the Bible. And you shouldn't have to ask that." (G.4.a.v.).

"I've never heard anybody say one of [the minister's] sermons was bad or that they couldn't concentrate on them. There's not much humour. When occasionally he does do it there's a ripple of warmth. You can relate to the message. People might say it's a good sermon, but they can't tell you what it was about. It's usually a reasonable length, but sometimes he goes over the length." (H.4.a.iii.).

"In the sermon he does relate to the lives of other people...It's usually quite famous people - achievers and sports personalities. It's quite interesting, although sometimes I think he goes on a bit about that. But he always brings it round in the end to the reading...I do look forward to the sermon - you always get a message, or you should. To me it's very important that there's some relevance to what's read. I do find it very meaningful. The ascription - I've no idea what that's all about. I'm not sure if that's something which could be easily missed. For me, I could do without that and the invocation." (J.4.b.i.).

"[The minister] is a fine preacher...He's always up to the minute. Certainly he sticks to the Bible story...I phone my friend after the service and ask, 'What did you think of that?'...We comment on what's been said in the sermon. Sometimes we feel he's made sweeping statements...I have felt a certain resentment: 'You're in a lofty tower and you have no way of knowing what's happening.' People don't want to hear about 'Her Majesty'. There's an element of showing off in that...And sometimes it's the whole sermon. People want to hear about the things that affect them, especially when they're going through a rotten time." (K.3.a.i.ii.).

"To a lot of people the sermon is the main point of the service." (L.3.a.v.).

"I like it when he brings in sportsmen like Arnold Palmer and famous people, to hear what they're like behind the scenes." (M.3.a.iii.).

"The sermon's the icing on the gingerbread. The rest of the service is leading up to that. I wouldn't say it's mainly why you're at the church, but I would say it's the main thing. You come away feeling, 'That was really good'." (N.4.a.vi.).

"If I criticise the sermons it's because I know [the minister] can deliver a very, very, good sermon on the odd occasion. You get the impression he makes it up as he goes along." (O.2.b.v.).

A recurrent theme in these comments is the content of sermons at Riverstane. Interviewees refer, both positively and negatively, to the subordination of directly Christian content to other subjects such as the minister's holidays (informant A), literature and poetry (informant B), invitations the minister receives to important occasions (informant D), famous people (informants D, J, and M), and royalty (informant K). What they are referring to is not the use of such material to illustrate or develop a Christian theme, but rather as the primary topic to which some religious or moral comment is appended. Some enjoy the sermons much as they are (informants B, H, J, M, and N), some would prefer to hear more about the Bible (informants A, D, G), some would prefer material which is more relevant to their lives (informants E and K), and informant O would prefer better preparation. Informant B considers the minister's sermon to be neither more nor less important than anything else in the service, while for informants J, L, and N it has special importance. There is some reference to tension and lack of humour (informants A, D, and K). For informant B it is enough to be aware of the minister's voice, with its anglicised cant of 'received pronunciation', without necessarily hearing what is said. On the other hand, for informants H and J, the message and its meaningfulness are important. When informant H says, "I've never heard anybody say one of [the minister's] sermons was bad or that they couldn't concentrate on them," this is probably because it is not the done thing at Riverstane openly to criticise the minister. On this point, when informant K begins with statements that are incompatible with what is said in subsequent sentences, it is not so much inconsistency as cultural competence: "Certainly he sticks to the Bible story...", followed by, "...People don't want to hear about 'Her Majesty'...and sometimes it's the whole

sermon." A final note here is that when informant J refers to the 'invocation of the Holy Trinity' prefacing the sermon and to the 'ascription of glory' after it, again this is a tradition which is not meaningful to everyone: "I've no idea what that's all about. I'm not sure if that's something that could be easily missed."

Clearly, congregants relate to the sermons as differentially as they do the other aspects of the worship tradition at Riverstane, and again the commitment to such tradition is not necessarily in terms of its Christian content. The final selection of extracts in this part of the chapter is concerned with some ceremonial aspects of the services:

"At communion when they do the Nicene creed, it's far too long to stand. I don't see why we should have that." (B.4.a.iv.).

"I like Riverstane because of the standing and the creed and these things. I like the layout of the service with the choir pieces...At the Nicene creed during the big communion [the minister] says you can sit if you prefer, but he doesn't expect you to. People would feel embarrassed." (D.4.a.iii.).

"When it comes to communion the pomp and ceremony is even worse...Sometimes the choir singing can go on too long and that can take the beauty away. At the Nicene creed, although [the minister] says all those who'd like to sit should sit, it's like 'all we like sheep' - you're frightened to sit down and so you go through the agony." (I.5.c.i.).

"One of the great things about Riverstane is the communion service - nowhere can it be done better. There's the dignified uniform of the elders and the way they're so well-drilled. No mistakes about where everything is to go - like clockwork. Also the very full choral service, particularly the Nicene creed, and the high watermark of the settings brings the whole gospel out." (R.2.c.ii.).

"There are the different services throughout the times of the year. The candle service is very nice...People like myself are exposed to criticism of the way services are done in Riverstane. I've been told we're very Episcopalian and Anglican...There's a sameness about the service which can be really boring." (E.5.a.v.vi.).

"We came to quite like the pattern of the service. I liked the order and the solemnity. The general air of Riverstane, moulded together by the music." (L.5.a.i.).

"The procedures in Riverstane have a dignity. People are giving their best for God. A reverence. I love the service and the music." (M.2.a.i.).

"There is much in the religious content for which one should be extremely thankful. And that, after all, is at the heart of it." (O.2.c.vii.).

"The high form of service appeals to me. My reason for going to church is to communicate with God." (T.1.c.iv.).

The main communion services which occur on five Sundays of the year are highly formal and ceremonial occasions. Part of the service involves choral settings of the Nicene Creed and other liturgical items. The significance of the comment by informant B is that the congregation remains standing throughout while the choir sings the creed, and this can last up to eight minutes and usually no less than five minutes. Some congregants privately object to it, as does informant B: "I don't see why we should have that." As the more elderly congregants experience some difficulty with the custom, the minister sometimes announces that those who wish to sit may do so, but informant D comments that "he doesn't expect you to." Informant I reports that "you're frightened to sit down and so you go through the agony." It seems that commitment to the worship tradition involves tolerating discomfort if necessary. While it is unlikely that there are any congregants at Riverstane who do not care for ceremony, it also seems that different people have their own level of appetite for it, as implied by informant J, cited earlier in another context: "I don't mind a bit of ceremonial, but not that." (J.4.a.iii.). At these communion services it is probably at its height, and indeed informant R regards the sung creed to be "the high watermark." On the other hand, informant I comments, "When it comes to communion the pomp and ceremony is even worse." While informant E considers the sameness of things to be unhelpful, informants D, L, M, O, and T speak with

appreciation of the liturgical aspects of the worship tradition.

To conclude this part of the chapter, it is evident from the above that congregants relate to the various features of the worship tradition at Riverstane Church in differing ways and sometimes in contrasting ways. This reflects a differential attachment to the symbol system around which congregants gather, and by means of which they construct a collective sense of self. Furthermore, the degree to which congregants have access to the content of symbolism in terms of Christian tradition is not necessarily a primary factor in their adherence to the commitment system.

II. The Public Face of Riverstane Church

Anthony Cohen, writing in connection with the Shetland island community of Whalsay, describes it as having a sense of distinctiveness which entails an implicit disparity towards other communities (1987: 82):

Their consciousness of the community and of its distinctiveness is so sensitised that it intrudes on their total experience of social life and, therefore, affects the meanings they attach to their symbolic constructs. It leads them continually, in Boon's phrase, 'to play the vis-à-vis'...The sense of community membership, however it may vary among its members, and Whalsay's difference from elsewhere, seem to pervade almost all aspects of local social life.

This description of the oppositional nature of the Whalsay community, which defines itself both in terms of difference from and exclusion of others, can equally be applied to congregational culture at Riverstane Church. While not geographically an island, it is in a somewhat insular position:

"Riverstane is very different from other churches. You don't link up with other churches. It's very isolated." (K.3.b.i.).

"The problem with Riverstane is that it has no parish. It's left very isolated." (O.1.b.iii.).

"You can't put change off indefinitely. That way you end up an island...Somehow or other the people in Riverstane are more resistant to changes. Maybe it's with it being an ancient building. Some of the people inside it are ancient too, and they don't want to change." (F.5.a.i.b.ii.).

The distinctiveness of Riverstane Church in its traditions of history, architecture, music, and worship, has a perhaps inevitably isolating effect. But it can also be argued that there is an intentionality about the way the congregation finds itself in a situation of being distinct from other churches. As informant I comments:

"In everything they do at Riverstane they've got to be different. Why? It's members of the congregation who've instigated this. What on earth makes them think that? What's different about them?" (I.4.a.vi.b.i.).

Aspects of Riverstane 'being different' and 'playing the vis-à-vis' will now be described in this second part of the chapter.

A. Idiosyncrasies of the Sunday Service

In the first part of the chapter, the symbolic quality of features of the worship tradition at Riverstane were set out. Here, it is the unusual aspects of the Sunday services, and particularly their impact upon visitors, that are being considered in terms of the way Riverstane presents itself in public worship.

From the earliest moments of the Sunday morning service there are respects in which it differs significantly from services in most other churches, and these differences are likely to take most visitors by surprise. The first of these is probably the procession of ministers. The 'warden', who in other churches would be known more conventionally as the beadle, carries a staff and leads the line of ministers, arranged in order of status and in full

view of the congregation, along the north aisle of the quire towards the choristers, who are wearing red robes and standing in two rows at the north transept. Relative to where congregants are sitting, the array of choristers is behind to their left, but obscured from view. On a given Sunday there can be five or six robed clergymen in the slowly paced procession, with the minister always at the end. The others are retired men in their sixties, seventies and nineties, and the minister himself is aged over seventy. These supplementary personnel receive no remuneration from Riverstane for being there and have notional titles such as 'Honorary Associate Minister' and 'Honorary Chaplain'.

Again, like the physical appearance of the building, this is a feature of Riverstane which has attracted reaction from outwith the congregation. On one occasion, significantly, the visitor was a minister from another congregation in the Church of Scotland, who was exercised to write to a national newspaper. The following is an extract from the letter, published in January 1994, under the heading, "A Plethora of Ministers":

...I think the time has come for the Church to take a look at the future of historic churches. Some of them are grossly over-staffed and seem to require the expenditure of huge sums of money on their buildings...Last summer I attended an evening service in Riverstane Church. [The minister] was not there but again there were three ministers in the procession...Granted that some of the ministers referred to are retired...Granted also that these historic churches attract grants from outside sources not available to some congregations, but I for one believe they have outlived their usefulness...

The above letter prompted a reply from a member of the congregation which was well-meaning but unintentionally revealing and in some respects perhaps even comic:

I was surprised at [the correspondent's] letter. He surely does not realise the extent of the duties and commitments the ministers of Riverstane Church have. If I may comment on the remark "three ministers in the procession", these ministers do a very necessary and good job. The Riverstane congregation comes from a very wide area...and one travels at the weekend from

the House of Lords. They are all dedicated to their duties. Riverstane is quite different from a suburban or rural church where the congregation lives within easy distance of the church. [The minister] has many public and civic, and indeed royal, duties to attend to...[The minister and his wife] are caring and dedicated. They are always available if one of the Riverstane family is bereaved, ill, or troubled, and much kindly help they give. Young couples come from Devon or the North of Scotland, and even Italy, so that [the minister] can baptise their babies...I pray I have helped to clarify the need in Riverstane Church for the "plethora of ministers".

Of particular interest here is the characteristic rhetoric of "Riverstane is quite different". Also significant is the rhetoric of "the Riverstane family," a phrase often used by the minister but which is not always heard with approval, such as when informant I comments: "This Riverstane 'family' - people see it as a lot of rot...It's a straight falsehood to call it a family." (I.1.a.v.).

Once the procession of ministers reaches the transept, another element of difference is the prayer with the choir which occurs out of sight but within earshot of the congregation, and which is usually chanted by the oldest minister at the top of his voice:

"At first I didn't know what was going on when it was the prayer. But then I saw some folk were bowing their heads. It took me a long time before I knew what it was. I can't really make out what's being said except the chant bit at the end." (J.4.a.i.).

"People would like to hear it - you feel the congregation should be participating in it. [The chanting minister's] voice can throw people, though...Visitors don't realise the service has started." (N.2.a.i.4.a.i.).

The disorienting effect of this is expressed by informant J, "I didn't know what was going on," and informant N, "[it] can throw people...Visitors don't realise the service has started." Further disorientation follows when the procession moves down the centre aisle and the congregation stands:

"It's good that the congregation stands when the ministers go down. It's that kind of service - it's high...It's a nice thing in Riverstane." (D.4.a.iii.).

"The ministers go down the centre aisle, the people stand, then the beadle gives the nod to [the minister] and everybody sits down. I'm not a great one for the bowing." (F.3.a.iv.).

"When the ministers are walking down, you hear the people behind you standing up or you see [the minister's wife] standing and you know it's time to move. The visitors round about you manage to follow. If only they could always get the printed order of service. Then when [the minister] sits in his place, the people know to sit down." (H.2.a.v.).

"Riverstane is different from smaller churches where the service is straightforward. Riverstane is ceremonial - that can be off-putting for people where they're unsure about things...And the standing up...If you were taking people with you to a service for the first time you would warn them about it." (J.2.a.iv.vi.viii.).

"When we first came the standing and the sitting all the time got on our nerves. We thought it was popery. We got used to it, though you didn't always know why you were standing. It was just high church. They don't do it in other churches." (L.5.a.i.).

While informant D and L indicate that this is something which congregants might be used to, for visitors it can be unpredictable. There is a specially printed leaflet explaining the service for visitors, but its distribution is arbitrary (informant H), and the standing and sitting "can be off-putting" (informant J), or it can get on their "nerves" (informant L). Also, informant F draws attention to the practice of some office-bearers who bow to the minister, as do some congregants.

One of the components of the service which visitors might reasonably expect to be straightforward is the Lord's Prayer. However, even that is different. Interviewees comment:

"It's awkward for the visitors during the Lord's Prayer because of 'trespasses'." (H.2.a.vi.).

"When it comes to the Lord's Prayer, people say it their own way and then stop when they realise."
(K.2.a.vi.).

It is not simply that 'trespasses' is used for 'debts'. In fact the version of the Lord's Prayer said at Riverstane is the one in the 1940 Church of England Book of Common Prayer, which does not correspond to either of the versions printed in the Church of Scotland Hymnary (Third Edition), and has up to seven points at which visitors tend to stumble.

Finally in this section, the following extracts indicate congregants' awareness of other differentness in the Riverstane worship tradition which can have the effect of catching visitors out:

"I don't understand the need for the sung amens. It doesn't happen in other churches." (J.4.a.iii.).

"At the end of the service when [the choir] sings the extra bit, people wonder, 'What are we standing for that for?' Visitors don't realise - they think it's finished. Could we not just have the triple amen?...At the evening service when you stand for the choir to finish at the end, I thought, 'What's all this about?' [Someone else] says you just have to do it...It's a different service at Riverstane. So you just accept it." (H.4.a.iv.).

"In the ordinary churches they'll have two modern hymns included in the service. Why do we have to be so stodgy? Why do we have to be different?" (I.5.a.v.).

"When you first go to Riverstane you pay attention to the procedure. I didn't know the apostles' creed. You gradually collect the various procedures and you might make a few mistakes to begin with - like not standing up at the right time. Strangers get flummoxed. You can see them looking round and watching people - it's a shame. You can see it with visiting ministers too - they don't know what to do." (K.2.a.iii.).

"At the Sunday service, sometimes visitors get the leaflet, and it gives you the number of the apostles' creed. Would it be out of place to give out the number for anybody who doesn't have the leaflet? People who aren't in the habit of saying it will be at a loss."
(N.4.a.iii.).

As a result of the various idiosyncrasies in the Sunday services at Riverstane, the visitors are conspicuous when they make "mistakes" and get "flummoxed" (informant K), or are visibly "at a loss" (informant N), and this reinforces the distinction between those who are insiders and the others who are outsiders.

B. The City Church

Public expression of differentness at Riverstane is also contained in its self-promotion as 'the city church'. This is a commonly heard phrase in the rhetoric of the congregation which can function to legitimise aspects of its differentness. As was noted in the previous chapter (on page 170 above), historically Riverstane is indeed the first church of the city. However, it appears that those who use the term 'the city church' intend it to convey more than antecedence. One interviewee, from the neighbouring church which had closed down, said that on joining the congregation, "We knew that Riverstane wouldn't close - after all, it's a city church" (A.4.a.ii.). By this, the informant does not mean 'a church in the city', since the other church in question is only about two hundred yards away, but rather 'a church of the city'. The assumption being made by the informant is that Riverstane has a guaranteed future because of its identification with the city, which makes it different from other churches.

As noted earlier (on page 209 above), Stromberg (1986: 13) points out that in a commitment system the symbols can so blend with the experience of people that they identify with those symbols. In the case of Riverstane, where the building is particularly symbolic, some congregants appear to conflate the survival of the building with that of the congregation. However, there are also those who are quite aware that the future is contingent:

"Riverstane has been carried away with the fact that the property isn't theirs. So they're not thinking about the future...I would like to think of Riverstane in twenty years being established as a place people look up to...But are we still going to be there?... There's not enough new members, no young people coming in, just a lot of aged people with no young families...And now the younger elders have had enough - already they're giving things up." (L.2.a.iii.iv.c.i.).

"Riverstane is coming to the end of its life. You can see it in how old a lot of the people are...There's no growth. Why? No cultivation. No seed to cultivate with. When there was seed it was wasted and we're paying the price for it today...There really should be plenty life in Riverstane but it isn't there. I look around the church and see white heads and I wonder how long is this going to last? Then one white head goes and another one takes its place...The way things are going in Riverstane you can almost see this contraction. Something's coming to an end. There's no growth." (E.2.b.iv.5.b.ii.).

"We must look to the future. No-one is just thinking about the present. Any thinking person must wonder about the future of the congregation. It is a diminishing congregation and an aging congregation. People are very concerned." (O.1.a.ii.).

Just as it was noted in the previous chapter (on pages 185-186 above) that congregants experience a sense of dissonance in relation to tourists being excluded from the building if they not staying for the service, so also dissonance is associated with the obvious decline in the congregation despite its sense of importance as the city church. Informant L asks, "Are we still going to be there?", informant E states that "Riverstane is coming to the end of its life," and informant O comments that "any thinking person must wonder about the future of the congregation." However, the dissonance is such that some appear to suppress their awareness of the situation, and instead allow themselves to be "carried away" (informant L) with a sense of being different, special, and important.

In using the term 'the city church', congregants seem to intend by it something like 'the church to which the city's institutions and business community come' and, as a

corollary, 'the most important church in the city':

"City churches like Riverstane used to have a lot of business people in them who could just make special donations when required. Few and far between now." (L.2.a.v.).

In the previous chapter (on page 173 above) reference was made to the many civic bodies which return to Riverstane for annual services, and to the occasional grand events which take place, all reinforcing the idea of Riverstane as different, special, and more important than other churches. Related to the idea of 'the city church' is the title 'minister of Riverstane', meaning, not 'minister of Riverstane Church', but 'minister of the city of Riverstane'. However, as informant L admitted, "There's no such post as minister of Riverstane [the city of Riverstane] - that's a myth." (L.2.b.i.). The conception of being the city church, and so of being special and important, pervades the entirety of congregational life. Again, as Cohen states in relation to Whalsay society (1987: 82):

Their consciousness of the community and of its distinctiveness is so sensitised that it intrudes on their total experience of social life and, therefore, affects the meanings they attach to their symbolic constructs.

For example, in the national newspaper in which Riverstane places its church notice, and where the other churches are listed alphabetically, Riverstane has an arrangement whereby its own notice is always placed at the beginning. It also usually takes up more space than the others, and is correspondingly more expensive. Another example is the specially printed monthly church magazine. On this point, informant J comments: "We didn't get that kind of magazine in other churches." (J.4.a.v.). When, to cut costs, a fold-out version was produced, it was strongly complained by some congregants that this was not good enough for Riverstane Church, and by the next month the original format was resumed. Also, with regard to the sense of distinctiveness which led to the building of the visitor centre, informant R comments: "It was an absurd thing for such a congregation to

attempt." (R.1.d.vi.). A further example is the organ restoration programme: informant L comments, "We liked the organ, though not to the extent of spending four hundred thousand on it." (L.5.a.i.). In general, as informant F comments, "Everything in Riverstane is extremely important and needs to be done correctly." (F.1.a.v.).

C. Sinn Fein ('Ourselves Alone')

In this final section of the chapter, concomitant with the insular and oppositional nature of the congregation is a tendency for Riverstane to 'play the vis-à-vis', and as a result its isolated position tends to be reinforced.

Informant O observed:

"There is a lot of criticism of [the minister and his wife]. Not just in Riverstane, but outside Riverstane and in Edinburgh too. You can see it in the fact he didn't become moderator. Any minister of Riverstane is a very senior churchman and you mind it when he doesn't get to be moderator. Even when he isn't very good, eventually it gets to be the duffer's [incompetent person's] turn. So when they don't make him moderator, it's a reflection of how the church establishment thinks of him. And the presbytery too. If I was the minister of Riverstane I would woo the presbytery - but he doesn't even go to presbytery. But the feeling is that if there was a royal occasion then [the minister and his wife] will be there...There are powers in the city opposed to Riverstane." (O.1.a.v.b.iv.).

Informant E also alluded to the profile which Riverstane has in presbytery:

"Especially in the presbytery - Riverstane has a very hard time in the presbytery. So I tended to keep quiet about it that I came from Riverstane." (E.4.a.iii.).

Riverstane has a clear tendency to depart from conventional practice and procedure in ordering its affairs as a congregation in the Church of Scotland. An example of this is in the indiscriminate baptism of infants as inadvertently reflected in the congregant's letter quoted on page 222 above. While it would be possible to multiply examples, a particular instance of 'playing the vis-à-vis' relates to

the women's group in the congregation. When it was decided to part company with the Woman's Guild of the Church of Scotland, this was not over a disagreement of some kind :

"[The minister's wife] decided to...start something completely original, with a completely different syllabus. Anything that related to the Woman's Guild was stopped...[The minister's wife] said they would keep affiliation with the Woman's Guild but not take part in its activities. This meant it was really her own organisation...A few years ago [the minister's wife] decided to stop even nominal affiliation with the Woman's Guild to save money. It was a saving of fifty pounds and the result is that now we get no invitation to the assembly meetings. The Ladies' Association had no constitution at first...But the Church of Scotland made it compulsory." (S.1.a.ii.iii.).

"Years and years back there was the Woman's Guild in Riverstane. There was so much fighting it went defunct. So [the minister's wife] formed the Ladies' Association and insisted it wouldn't be called the Woman's Guild. They never sent anybody to the area meetings and her name was mud. They were supposed to pay money to Edinburgh, but [the minister's wife] stopped that, so they became unaffiliated...We're not allowed to be the Woman's Guild - we've got to be the Ladies' Association." (I.3.b.i.5.b.v.).

"When the Ladies' Association changed from the Woman's Guild...[the minister's wife] decided it, and said it was so that men could be allowed to come along to meetings, because men aren't allowed in the Woman's Guild. Then last year [the minister's wife] decided we wouldn't pay our dues to the Woman's Guild in Edinburgh." (N.3.b.ii.).

It is in connection with this matter that informant R comments, "Their motto is Sinn Fein - 'Ourselves Alone'." (R.1.a.iii.). But perhaps one of the most striking departures from Church of Scotland practice at Riverstane is in the composition of the kirk session, which has no women elders. Significantly, some women in the congregation appear to prefer it that way. Informant D comments:

"I'd rather have the men do everything if there are enough of them...I get the impression that rather than have women elders [the minister] will just get more men whether they're any good or not." (D.5.a.ii.iv.).

Other women take a different view:

"The elders in their tail coats - it's a bit archaic. But I don't know if that'll ever change. [Another woman member] is always saying to me, 'When are we going to get women in the pulpit and women elders?'...Riverstane is the last bastion of male chauvinism. I'm quite sure women could have their own uniform, so long as they leave the handbags behind." (P.1.b.ii.).

"I didn't like the fact there were no women elders. Although I'm not even mildly militant, I felt that since it's the church it deserves some consideration. Especially when you consider so many other things in Riverstane are run by women." (Q.1.a.v.).

With regard to the reasons for not having women elders, one woman suggested: "We'd be told they'd look silly in a penguin suit." (G.5.a.i.). Others confirmed this:

"I've nothing against women elders, but in Riverstane I'm not sure it would work so well as male elders in tail coats." (O.2.b.iv.).

"I've nothing against women elders...Maybe they'd put the wind up the men elders...I've spoken to a number of people about women elders and I've never found a single lady in favour of it...Women elders would shock a lot of people...It wouldn't go through smoothly - you'd lose a few members." (F.5.a.i.iv.b.iii.).

Two members have indeed been lost over the issue, although it was for being in favour of women elders. One female congregant who had been an elder in another Church of Scotland congregation was not admitted to the kirk session at Riverstane, while her husband was. She no longer attends. Another member who no longer attends is an elder who formally raised in the kirk session the issue of women elders. Informants commented on this:

"He had prepared a presentation, but [the minister] decided on the quiet he wasn't having woman elders. When [the elder] finished his presentation, right away they moved on to next business." (L.3.b.ii.).

"He put forward a motion in favour of women elders. [The minister] was very much in the wrong about that - he stamped his foot and he wouldn't allow any discussion. But he needn't have bothered, because he would have got the vote anyway." (F.5.a.iii.).

These are some examples of how Riverstane Church typically 'plays the vis-à-vis'. Informant I comments: "It's sad to think that we're not a normal church even when it comes to the organisations." (I.5.b.v.). Informant E explains: "Riverstane's attitude is often, 'We don't need to do that here'." (E.4.b.v.). Lastly, informant R notes: "Riverstane is such a strange place." (R.1.d.vi.).

Conclusion

Although socially segmented, the congregation is held together by means of its commitment system, particularly through attachment to the symbols of tradition, Christian and other, as contained in the building, the history, the music, and the services of worship. Congregants relate to these cultural features somewhat differentially, so that individuals might vary in the degree to which they appreciate them. However, the degree to which congregants have access to the Christian content of their traditions does not seem to be a factor in the degree to which they participate in their commitment system. Also, it seems that the various symbolic traditions referred to above are at least as important to congregants as Christian tradition is in their construction of a collective sense of self.

The expression of collective identity in the self-presentation of Riverstane is in some ways characterised by an oppositional stance towards others, and can be traced in the context of public worship and the congregation's profile in the public domain. This is reflected in the idiosyncrasies of the Sunday service whereby visitors can be disoriented and unable to avoid 'making mistakes', for example in the standing and sitting, and it is also found in the conventional practice at Riverstane of 'playing the vis-à-vis' towards other social entities.

Elements in the commitment system at Riverstane can also be a source of dissonance among congregants, such as the tradition of not admitting women elders. However, individuals who are seen publicly to challenge symbols of tradition are effectively breaking their attachment to the commitment system, and may be unable to continue as cultural insiders. Informant I comments:

"Tradition is all right, but...you can concentrate on tradition and leave out the important things. Anyway, where does the tradition come from?...The tradition is a dividing line." (I.4.b.ii.).

The next chapter considers social processes at Riverstane that give rise to some dissonance among congregants, but which are also tied in with the commitment to status in the congregation, and attention is given to the role of symbolic boundaries (or 'dividing lines', as informant I puts it) in the demarcation of cultural insiders and outsiders.

Micro-Politics and Status Economics at Riverstane Church

Introduction

In the material presented so far in Part Two, the social significance of characteristic features at Riverstane Church has been unfolding progressively. In Chapter Five, a consideration of the movement of people into and through the building provided cultural information on the social segmentation of the congregation. In Chapter Six, the symbols of tradition around which congregants gather were described, with particular attention to the building and the Sunday morning services of worship. This chapter continues the discussion with regard to the symbolic dimension which governs the segmentation of the congregation in its social processes.

Interviewees commenting on the social segmentation at Riverstane draw attention to the elements of demarcation and sometimes conflict which accompany it:

"People don't all pull together in Riverstane - they're separate entities...They don't believe in getting together." (D.3.b.ii.).

"There doesn't seem to be very much cohesion."
(E.4.a.v.).

"It's because of the competition...There are too many divisions in the congregation. Too much status."
(I.1.a.v.).

"I find I'm piggy in the middle between the warring factions. The 'normal' set can't get at the other side because of a veneer of good manners. They do all the social things. Snubbing. One time there was almost a punch-up at the coffee stall - and both of them came up to me, dragging me aside and doing my ear in. I couldn't handle it and started to wail myself."
(T.1.a.vi.).

The term 'micro-politics' is used here to refer to the normal establishing of power relations among people within an organisation as an aspect of culture. It is not concerned with the group dynamics or social psychology of the organisation, but rather with the cultural dimensions of these power relations. If the external parameters which impinge upon churches in general may be regarded as being at the macro-level, with local churches at the meso-level, then a focus upon the individual congregation is at the micro-level, and this is the force of the prefix in the word 'micro-politics'. It does not follow from this that the focus is upon trivial epiphenomena of congregational life. As Helen Schwartzman comments (1993: 38):

Organizational researchers have been slow to realize the value of examining the "everyday routines" that make up organizational life because, for the most part, these routines have either been taken for granted...or dismissed as unimportant. In contrast some researchers have begun to realize that routines...provide researchers with important information about the social structure and culture of organizations and society.

Accordingly, in this chapter the micro-political focus is not upon quotidian details of internal politics in the congregation, which by their nature are somewhat incidental, but rather upon the established social processes underlying them. At Riverstane these are predicated upon commitment to the status economy of the congregation, and this will be described below in two parts. The first part of the chapter considers the publicly allocated nature of status, taking as an example the cultural scene of meetings as a context in which this operates, and the second part turns to the symbolic boundaries around which the status economy functions. As in previous chapters, there will be ample reference to participant observation and ethnographic interviews, as well as references of a comparative nature.

I. The Public Allocation of Status

Congregants are conscious of the micro-political processes at Riverstane to varying degrees. For some, their awareness is at a reflective level and for others it is more intuitive. As James Spradley puts it, "much of our cultural knowledge is tacit...and outside our awareness" (1979: 49). Similarly, people differ with regard to the ways in which they are caught up in these processes; some are intentional, while for others it is more by default. Among those at Riverstane who have a reflective awareness of micro-politics in the congregation, there is a concern that it is in tension with what it means to be the church:

"It's not a religious place - could be the Houses of Parliament." (C.1.a.viii.).

"I see the session clerk as the chief executive and [the minister] as the chairman. You can slot people in by their faces and the way they act. I can see the poor guy who takes the stick and the guy who's most ambitious to get on the board. It's to do with 'corporation' - not 'co-operation'. The structure is nothing to do with the church. There's no evangelism, no faith, no glow of Christian fellowship...A lot of people get turned off in Riverstane from the faith point of view because of this structure." (E.3.c.ii.).

"It's all to do with status...It can hurt - you can feel sensitive at times. They make you feel you're nothing - as if to say, 'What are you doing here?'...But religion isn't about that...Status and atmosphere are the problem in Riverstane...Snobbery is to the front - and as long as that's there, how can we be the church?" (I.1.a.v.vi.2.a.iii.3.b.iii.).

Informant D not only regards the micro-politics to be in opposition to religious values, but its prominence in congregational life is such that Riverstane is "not a religious place." Informant E refers to behaviour associated with blaming and competitiveness, and again places it in opposition to what it means to be the church: "I can see the poor guy who takes the stick and the guy who's most ambitious...The structure is nothing to do with the church." The result is "no evangelism, no faith, no glow of Christian fellowship." The idea of people being

"turned off" the church is reminiscent of Tom Allan's description of people being "chilled out" by the congregation (1984: 34). Informant I identifies status as being central to the micro-politics, which can be hurtful, and again is in opposition to what it means to be the church: "It's all to do with status...It can hurt...But religion isn't about that." Hurtfulness is a theme to which informant E also refers in another extract: "All the things that happen - it hurts people." (E.4.a.vi.). Congregants experience a sense of dissonance in this respect, given that churches are not meant to be hurtful places, just as it is experienced on account of the exclusion of tourists from the building if they do not intend to stay for the service (described on pages 185-186 above), and also experienced in the disparity between the collective sense of self as being special and the reality of congregational decline (pages 225-226 above).

Interviewees make the following comments on what tends to be valued in the congregation:

"It's all based on surface values - what they see, the way you look, how you dress, how you speak. It's all based on appearances, not what's in your heart."
(T.1.b.v.).

"One reason that the congregation is in a bad way could be that there's too much emphasis on the well-to-do...This ostentation - ambition - is not part of my church and a lot of people must feel the same."
(E.1.b.iv.2.b.v.).

"Things 'must be right' - it doesn't matter what's wrong with the congregation so long as things look right...Everything has got to be big in that church, and it's not always the best. Big doesn't mean good."
(I.5.b.i.c.iii.).

In general terms, status is the basic unit of micro-political currency at Riverstone Church, and the extent to which its social reality is governed by micro-politics is such that it might be regarded as a 'status economy'. In any organisation, status is attached to those things which are sources of power, whether it be money, social class, the

authority associated with office, and so on. At Riverstane, status is attached to seniority in age, wealth, social class and social rank, as well as anything to do with the monarchy (especially the honours system), the military, political affiliation with the Conservative Party, association with prominent institutions, and the business community.

Anthony Cohen, in his ethnography of Whalsay society, describes the way in which identity is publicly allocated to individuals by others in the community, rather than being established by the persons concerned (1987: 60). A similar phenomenon can be recognised at Riverstane, whereby the status of a person is generally conferred by others in the normal course of congregational life rather than being independently brokered by the individual, and some of the ways in which such status is publicly allocated are discussed below.

A. Committee Meetings

One of the features which is characteristic of Riverstane is the abundance of committees. Informant I comments:

"I've never been in a church with so many committees, and committees within committees...One part of the committee's against the other, and so what chance do the rest of us have?" (I.5.c.v.).

Committees at Riverstane have an important role in ordering the status of individuals in the congregation. People can be simply 'told' that they are on committees, rather than being invited to join them. Relative newcomers who have already demonstrated an attachment to the congregational commitment system, in terms of its traditions and emphasis upon status, tend to be placed onto committees at an early opportunity, and sometimes at a level of responsibility. Sometimes people who are generally unknown to other congregants have been put in charge of committees. This can have the effect of 'putting down' the status of those who

are already on the committee:

"[The minister] will put new people on to a committee as soon as they arrive...In any other church it's usually the members who attend who are the officials...And people are brought into Riverstane when they need somebody to fill a job. But they're not church-minded...Some of these new elders have never been in the church before." (C.3.a.ii.b.ii.5.a.iv.).

"Committees appear out of nowhere. You don't know who's on them. The flower committee - that's a shut door. The linen and fabric committee - some people on it never go to the church." (D.3.b.i.).

"There's a status thing about how long you've been in Riverstane. People use it like a track record. Then there's the people who've been there ten years who think of it as a lifetime. It's like a scorecard. People have worked over the years in the church and given to it, and yet other people come in from the outside and take over - very frustrating." (E.3.b.iii.).

"It's not how long you've been there - it's who you are." (I.1.a.vii.).

People sometimes find they are co-opted onto committees in such a way that it becomes awkward for them to refuse.

Informant P, as a relatively recent newcomer, described it as follows: "I was 'told' I was doing the [church magazine]...Then I got this letter saying, 'You're on the magazine committee'." (P.1.a.viii.). Once allocated to committees, people can find it equally difficult to stand down. By not accepting a person's intention to give up a committee, their status is again being limited. Commenting on this, informant S referred to another person as "going through the same experience I did - she's having to submit her resignation year after year." (S.1.b.iii.). Another phenomenon is that relative newcomers, once they have been brought into committees, can also after an initial period experience a lowering of status. Informant E comments:

"Over the last ten years people like businessmen have been brought into the church and the session and these are the ones that support [the minister]...And the people who get brought in hit the skids - I've seen it time and again - they come in, are socially acceptable, get invited to parties, and end up being totally out - dropped." (E.1.a.vii.b.i.).

Actual decision-making, however, tends in effect to be done outside of meetings:

"You might get on [a committee] but it's another matter whether you can open your mouth...That's the way they run Riverstane - a small number will bully the others...that's what happens throughout Riverstane. You see people at committee meetings you've never seen before...Take that AGM - it wasn't the way we associate with meetings like that. It's not a normal church. That's meant to be a business meeting - anybody should be able to ask questions. But that didn't happen. It was all cut and dried." (C.3.a.iv.).

"If you're on the periphery at Riverstane and you don't hear things, you'd be inclined to think everything's all right. But the way things work, you'll be on a committee, and then a sub-committee decides something behind the scenes and then presents it as a fait accompli." (L.2.b.ii.).

Informant C refers to the pressure which congregants can experience to remain passive at committee meetings: "a small number will bully the others." The significance of the comment about the annual general meeting of the congregation is that it was the first AGM ever. Riverstane had never held such meetings before 1995 until the Church of Scotland enforced this. However, instead of being a proper business meeting in which congregants were encouraged to ask questions, particularly in relation to church finances, in the event this did not occur: "It was all cut and dried." Informant L indicates this is a common practice at meetings in general: "a sub-committee decides something behind the scenes and presents it as a fait accompli." For example, this was what happened in relation to the organ renovation project (page 175 above).

Asking questions and making suggestions at meetings is generally discouraged unless the individual in question has sufficient status. An example of this was on the occasion when the unsuccessful building development for a visitor centre was launched (page 175 above):

"Some people at the time would have liked to make their suggestions about the project when it was being planned, but they weren't allowed to...But you ask yourself why you didn't do something about it. People

cut out. Didn't want to make a fuss. If you did you wouldn't get support - you'd be left isolated." (E.2.b.iv.).

"At the planning meeting it was just pushed - not enough questions were allowed. We were told at the beginning that the meeting would stop at ten to nine." (R.1.d.vi.).

Informant E refers to the inhibition of congregants in speaking out because "you wouldn't get support - you'd be left isolated." This is what happened on the occasion (noted on page 230 above), when an elder attempted to raise the subject of women elders in the kirk session. He had been encouraged by individuals who said in private that they agreed with him, but who failed to support him when it came to the actual meeting of the kirk session. Also, informant R above refers to the phenomenon in which items of business are "just pushed" and the asking of questions is discouraged, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly. Instances of how this happens are now described below in the context of a specific meeting at Riverstane.

1. A Kirk Session Meeting

To give a sense of how matters of status and micro-politics in general can operate through meetings, there follows an ethnographic account of an ordinary, actual meeting of the kirk session on the evening of 4 March 1996, the first of the year. Since the meeting is also the last of fiscal year, the key item of business is the financial report. The text which follows is an extract from the researcher's fieldnotes on the occasion. Each paragraph of fieldnotes contains underlined points, the cultural significance of which are then briefly commented upon.

In the basement hall, twenty elders, all men, are seated in chairs set out facing the boardroom table where the minister sits with the session clerk and convener of the finance committee on either side. The elders are seated either side of a central gap in rows of three or two, and people sit beside those with whom they are most closely associated. There is quiet and friendly conversation as

they wait for the meeting to start. One of the elders discreetly hands to another elder a book on trustholders for funding applications, from which he takes notes throughout the entire meeting, hardly ever looking up. At 7.33 the minister rises to his feet and without hesitation so do all the elders. Immediately the minister calls the meeting to order with the words, "Let us pray." The prayer uses the vocabulary of a church court with reference to the present meeting, commemorates an elder whose funeral took place that morning, and goes on to the congregation in general as well as the families of those present, using thee-and-thou forms throughout. At 7.35 the prayer ends, the minister sits down, and the elders follow suit. Then the session clerk seated on the minister's right rises slowly to his feet. With dramatic delivery he announces, "Mo-de-ra-tor, breth-ren, I have received the following apologies for absence..." After listing several names in a hierarchical social order ("Lord so-and-so, Sir such-and-such, Dr this, Messrs that, and the Reverends odds-and-bods") he sits down and waits for elders to call out other names.

The hall is the basement room of the building which was the outcome of the ambitious but undercapitalised development of a visitor centre undertaken by the congregation. Not counting the three sitting behind the table, the presence of twenty elders at the meeting out of a potential fifty-six is the normal level of attendance. In fact there are nominally sixty-eight members of the kirk session, but this includes those who no longer attend for reasons of health, or infirmity, or because they are lapsed members or have moved away. It is generally the same men who attend on each occasion. As noted previously, there is an unofficial policy of not having women elders at Riverstone. The seating arrangement emphasises the authority located at the boardroom table which, with dimensions of 5m by 1m, was specially commissioned by the congregation for the new building at the cost of some thousands of pounds. There are twelve matching, red leather upholstered chairs which were also specially commissioned at a cost in the thousands. These are distinct from the ordinary seats for the rest of the company. Although in most settings people will naturally prefer to be seated beside their associates, in this case it is heightened by the relative social status

shared by affines. The elder preoccupied with a book illustrates in his own way the general lack of engagement which characterises these meetings, with the elders tending to sit passively throughout. At the beginning of the meeting people are poised to take their cue the moment when the minister stands, and similarly wait until he sits down first. The highly formal tone of the meeting is also added to by the style of language used in the prayer and by the session clerk. Further, the session clerk's ordering of the names on the list in terms of social precedence reflects the commitment to status in congregational culture.

At 7.36 the minister goes through the minutes of the previous meeting and asks if they are agreed. Nobody speaks, and this is taken as approval. Then the minister and session clerk sign the minutes. At 7.38 the minister stands and welcomes Professor Williams, seated on his left, as the new convener of the finance committee, who remains seated to report on the accounts in the absence of the treasurer. He begins with a reference to summary accounts prepared for the annual general meeting of the congregation, although copies of these accounts are not supplied to the kirk session. He mentions the date of the AGM, which is in three weeks' time, but until that moment no prior reference to this AGM had been made to the kirk session. The convener announces a shortfall, in congregational giving over expenditure, of £14,312 for the year which is offset by transfers from other funds. £4,500 has been put aside to meet heating and lighting costs for the church building, which have yet to be billed. This is something that Riverstane has not had to pay before, he adds, and they don't know how much it will be, but it is something they will have to live with from now on...So Riverstane is not paying its way, he concludes, and if it weren't for the substantial reserves which are mostly for designated purposes, the church would otherwise be bankrupt. There is a need to increase giving...As he recently heard at a conference, giving is just one part of stewardship, and the problem is how do we get the congregation more actively involved in general...A hundred copies of the accounts and summary accounts are being prepared for the AGM, plus sixty copies of the minutes of the last finance committee meeting...All in all there is a need to get £61,000 from offerings over the year ahead if they are going to pay their way.

As noted earlier, congregants have a marked reluctance towards speaking out during meetings, whether it be to make

a point or simply to indicate assent. The new convener of the finance committee, the most prestigious of the convenerships in the congregation, is a relative newcomer at Riverstane. His trajectory is consistent with the pattern described earlier by which insiders are in effect enculturated through committee membership. It was only six months after joining the church that he became a member of the important finance committee, then about six months later was the vice-convener, eleven months later became an elder, and a year later the convener of the finance committee. As a committee it is technically subject to the jurisdiction of the kirk session, but in practice since it is run by elders this official arrangement is little more than a formality. Hence at this key meeting where the accounts for the financial year are supposed to be discussed by the kirk session, no copies are provided. Significantly, nobody raises this as an issue. The date of the AGM, when the accounts are to be presented to the congregation, is briefly mentioned in passing, but this is news to the ordinary members of the kirk session, partly on account of the fact that there had been no meeting of the kirk session since November (a February meeting was cancelled because of snow). With regard to the payment for utilities at Riverstane, this has hitherto been met by Historic Scotland, who are the owners (as noted on page 173 above), with the congregation as a free tenant. The convener admits that the congregation is in fact financially well off with substantial funds in reserve, although the income through offerings alone does not cover expenses (which by definition do not include maintenance or utilities). He also comments on the lack of participation by church members in the life of the congregation, which he links to the level of their giving in weekly offerings. Next, the number of copies of the accounts being produced for the AGM is, at one hundred, a true reflection of the number of congregants who are regular attenders at Sunday morning services, as opposed to the official church roll which ostensibly approaches seven

hundred members. Further, the number of copies of the minutes of the finance committee meeting is, at sixty, also a true reflection of the number of congregants who are most committed in their attendance Sunday by Sunday and who can be expected to be present at the AGM. In the event, fifty people attended.

At 7.46 the minister asks if there are any questions. Silence. Then the session clerk asks if the kirk session can approve the accounts for the purposes of the AGM. A former convener of the finance committee proposes approval, which is seconded by Mr McGuire. Then the minister goes on to explain it is a statutory requirement that they must have an AGM. He asks the kirk session to homologate the decision already taken to have it in three weeks' time. Nobody speaks. This is taken as agreement. The minister adds that it would be good at moments like these if they voiced their agreement. The elders then do so. The minister thanks Professor Williams, the treasurer and the finance committee. At 7.48 the minister goes through the minutes of a meeting with Historic Scotland. He takes them paragraph by paragraph, giving a continuous commentary on selected points, speaking slowly and verbosely. He eventually asks if there are any questions. Silence. The minister then signs the minutes.

Although the minister asks if there are any questions on the accounts, it is not a particularly open invitation since unofficially, as described earlier, questions are not on the whole encouraged in meetings at Riverstane. Elders tend to ask questions only exceptionally, and it is unlikely in any case that searching questions on the accounts could be asked when no document containing the figures is supplied, particularly when the treasurer, who is responsible for the accounts, is inexplicably absent from the meeting. However, the kirk session nevertheless goes on to approve the accounts which they have not actually seen. Due to the AGM being made compulsory by the Church of Scotland, it is only the second year running in which this has taken place at Riverstane. With regard to the date of AGM, as a formality the minister 'requests' the approval of the kirk session, and as was noted earlier it is not an unusual procedure at Riverstane for decisions to be made by a subset of people

and then only later ratified by others as a formality. The response to the request is one of silence, and this time it is criticised by the minister, with a resulting increase in tension in the meeting. Then, having been explicitly prompted to voice agreement, they enunciate their approval, but the next time they are silent as before. The minister then speaks for seven minutes on the subject of the meeting with Historic Scotland, with a markedly deliberate pace and expanding somewhat arbitrarily upon the document which everybody had previously received with the other papers, and which could have been dealt with in a few seconds. He does not directly address the company or look at them, but reads through the minutes and free-associates upon them as if the others present are simply overhearing it.

At 7.55, in the absence of the roll-keeper, the session clerk takes the next item which relates to the statistics of the communion roll. He delivers the arithmetic in his dramatic style but with a light-hearted tone, to the improvement of the atmosphere in the meeting. At the beginning of 1995 there were 677 members on the communion roll. During the year there were sixteen deaths, two transfers to other congregations, three new communicants by profession of faith, twelve by certificate, and one by resolution of the kirk session. The net result is 675 members on the roll by 31 December 1995. There were fourteen baptisms. He asks the session to attest the roll. Silence. This is taken as attestation. After a moment, Mr McGuire speaks up: "675 on the roll? Where are they on Sunday?" The minister replies speaking quickly and at length: "Some are in the USA, some are in Europe, some are in England, some are in Scotland but too far away, some are ill, some are home looking after the ill, some we don't know about..." After he finishes, Mr McGuire replies quickly: "And do we have any contact with them? At a time of financial embarrassment do we ask them for money?" The minister replies with what seems to be irritation: "Some we are not in contact with, but others are contacted and they make contributions through covenants and freewill offerings..." Again Mr McGuire responds quickly: "And is it a favourable response we're getting?" The minister replies, again at length: "Some response is more favourable than no response. These are people who have moved away from the city and like to keep contact with Riverstone - some for sentimental reasons, some have no contact with other churches, some are very active in other churches but keep the contact with Riverstone. It would be possible to seek a better

response - we could allocate lists to members of the kirk session and ask them to correspond with the people and keep knocking at the door until requested not to do so...This is just from the top of my head...That's the way I feel about it." Silence.

The session clerk introduces a moment of relief in his light-hearted treatment of the item concerning the church roll, and the effect is to reduce the degree of tension which has been building up in the meeting. As was described earlier (on page 180 above), the number of members on the roll is for various reasons very much greater than the number of congregants attending Sunday morning services, and this is taken up by one of the elders. Mr McGuire is one of the few elders who generally attempts to raise issues at kirk session meetings, and here he asks a short and direct question. In dramatic contrast to the previous few minutes, the minister replies in a fast-talking pace, once again free-associating at length, and in such a manner that does not expect a reply. However, Mr McGuire nevertheless asks another concise question. The voice of the minister then takes on an apparently censorious tone and the tension in the meeting rises further. Undeterred, Mr McGuire asks one more brief question, and the minister's final extended reply with its vaguely threatening content brings the exchange to a peremptory close. As a result of occurrences like this, the disinclination of elders to ask questions in general is probably reinforced.

At 8.03 the minister asks Professor Williams to speak on the organ renovation contract...After he makes some comments, the minister then interjects: "Could I just add, in view of the notice [by the organist, complaining against Historic Scotland] which appeared on the board in the nave...We have an ongoing relationship with Historic Scotland and such notices are not conducive to such relationships. I would like the session clerk to minute the kirk session's regret at this and to write both to Historic Scotland and to the director of music informing them of it." Professor Williams intervenes with what seems to be an attempt to change the subject. The minister brings it back. Professor Williams tries to introduce another change of subject. The minister then

suddenly produces a file of correspondence on the subject which he quotes from, and goes on to say: "It is always unfortunate to parade before the public that all is not happy between Historic Scotland and Riverstane when it is not the case and we owe so much to them, so I think it is reasonable for the session clerk to act as I suggested." Professor Williams intervenes once more, again on a different matter. This time the minister ignores him and looks directly at the elders: "Is that agreed?" Silence. This is taken as agreement.

The organ renovation project, which was described earlier, had been set up by kirk session members behind the scenes and without informing the minister until it was well under way. As a result, the minister had consistently opposed it. While Professor Williams is still speaking, the minister interjects without warning on the matter of the organist's complaint about a delay which was caused to the project. The minister peremptorily instructs the session clerk to give the organist a written reprimand in the name of the kirk session. Significantly, the organist's supporters conspicuously do not come to his defence, but it is not clear whether they are intimidated, restrained, cautious, shrewd, or some combination of these. The way in which the file of correspondence is then dramatically and unexpectedly produced has a premeditated and almost theatrical quality about it. Apparently the professor attempts repeatedly to distract from this but is in effect publicly snubbed. When the minister asks if this is agreed, in spite of the sentence construction the tone of voice is clearly in the imperative rather than the interrogative mood. In the silence which follows, the tension is at its highest yet.

At 8.18, the session clerk stands up to introduce the next item concerning Riverstane's collection of old books. "There is the suggestion from Mr Gordon to circulate a list of books to universities and other libraries for the purposes of lending." Looking to the minister, he adds: "I understand there might be a negative reaction to this." The minister begins: "I think it is very useful to have a library committee to decide what the purpose of Riverstane's library should be...[A former member] had the naive idea of circulating the books. This cannot be done. To circulate a list which lets people know we have books

about Riverstone would not necessarily be a good idea, since they might want to borrow them and making sure we got them back would be a problem, especially as some of them are valuable. However there is room for discussion as to whether we should have a Riverstone library. I think the idea is a very good one. [Another member] urged us into the project of building this building partly in order to house books, but the library...is now under lock and key because the books cannot be left out on the open shelf. But if anybody has any ideas about how the library should be run then they would be most welcome...". Then the minister suggests a vote of thanks for the person who finished organising the books. The kirk session gives spirited hear-hears and a spontaneous round of applause. Professor Williams suggests that it might be possible to participate in the inter-library loans system, and another elder adds, "It's a shame not to make use of the books," but their comments are left hanging.

The point about this item of business is not so much in its content, which is fairly insignificant, but rather the issue behind it concerning control of territory, that is, the modest basement room in which the meeting is being held and where the books are housed. The books themselves are not of particular importance, the collection is small in size, and the claim that the building project was motivated in part to accommodate them is hardly serious. This item of business is also significant in that the opportunity for Riverstone to have a co-operative public profile with other bodies is characteristically rejected in favour of the somewhat oppositional stance described earlier (on page 219 above). However, no discussion is allowed on this, but only on the question of whether there should be a collection of books at all, which is redundant since the collection is already fully catalogued and arranged on the shelves before the elders' eyes. The proposal of a vote of thanks effectively forecloses the matter, and by this time the tension is such that the disproportionate applause provides a welcome means for discharging it. The two comments at the end are ignored.

At 8.26, the minister comments how early it is as the session clerk turns to the final item on the agenda, which is for any other competent business. He asks the minister

to go over the special services taking place in the period ahead. The minister starts going through his pocket diary page by page without looking up, nebulously free-associating at length on every point, more in the style of someone thinking out loud while the other people are required to listen. At 8.38, the business turns to the date of the next meeting. This is also deliberated at length, eventually settling on a date which is sixteen weeks away. The minister then resumes his commentary on the services ahead. During this Mr Dunn suddenly stands up, somewhat incongruously, and with apparent awkwardness interrupts to ask a question about the difficulty in opening one of the church doors. The session clerk replies wryly: "It's like most things in Riverstane - there's a knack to it." The minister then comments on the technique for opening the door. By this time the meeting is drifting aimlessly. It is 8.43, and replacing his pocket diary the minister stands up to close the meeting. The elders immediately rise to their feet and the minister pronounces the benediction. There are brief conversations while people collect their coats before leaving.

Having reached the end of the agenda in only about fifty minutes, the minister's comment that it is still early is an indication that he does not intend the meeting to finish so quickly. Effectively he ensures that what should take roughly a couple of minutes lasts for twelve, and then what should take some seconds stretches to five minutes. This is not unusual at the end of such meetings. The next scheduled meeting is virtually four months away and, since the kirk session previously met fourteen weeks ago, this means that before the next meeting there will only have been two meetings over a seven month period.

This detailed description of a kirk session meeting encapsulates a number of features which are characteristic of the micro-politics throughout congregational life at Riverstane. The commitment to matters of status is evident in the reference to a hierarchy of social precedence, and the publicly allocated nature of status is seen in the degree to which people are heard willingly, or snubbed, or criticised, or put down, and also in the degree to which the people concerned accept this. Other features include the lack of participation by congregants in the decision-making

process, the pushing of decisions upon others, the inhibiting of people through tension or intimidation, and the use of surprise tactics to catch people off guard. A particular feature is the power which is associated with authority and the degree to which congregants give their consent to it, and this will be turned to in the next section.

B. The De-Skilling of Individuals

Social interaction at meetings and in church on a Sunday is the primary context where people are given, rather than determine, their status in the congregation. Associated with this is the phenomenon of people becoming apparently 'de-skilled'. At the kirk session meeting described above this was evident in the fact that elders did not participate as the responsible, highly qualified, and mature individuals that they otherwise are. Informant E describes this as follows:

"I know there's got to be politics in the church, but I wouldn't mind if it was democratic. The kirk session is very autocratic - not democratic. I've sat there and felt I had to get on my feet and say something but I knew it would be a mistake. If I chaired a meeting like that at work I'd be dumped into the [river]...The session is chaired as a dictatorship...[At one meeting] men who outside the church would have blasted anybody for questioning their integrity - these men sat like schoolchildren." (E.1.a.vi.b.i.2.b.vi.).

The idea of men sitting "like schoolchildren" is another way of referring to the infantilising of congregants, which by definition is to be allocated low status. However, this is not confined to the kirk session, and indeed informant G describes it in connection with the women's group:

"The way the annual meeting of the ladies' association is run - if you tried to do that in the Tory party there'd be a riot...There's nothing democratic about it whatsoever. And the membership of the committee is just supposed to stay the same way - it's just a clique...It's the most undemocratic thing I've ever seen in my life. I don't remember an election of office-bearers in all the time I've been there. There

was a barrier to anybody standing up to them...The annual meeting is something to be seen to be believed. Anywhere else, when it comes to the financial report it's the treasurer. And the report is circulated. That would never happen in Riverstane. But it's [the minister's wife] who stands up and says what money is to go where. She says, 'Everybody agree to that - good.' It's quite incredible when you think about it...It's just awful. It's a dictatorship." (G.5.b.iv.c.iii.).

Further, in keeping with control over decision-making is the control of information:

"Not enough information is given to the congregation about what's happening and they're not being involved in the decisions made." (E.1.b.vi.).

"It's a certain few who run the church and you think, 'If they're doing it well, then all right.' But most people in the session and the congregation don't know what's going on behind the scenes." (L.2.b.iv.).

However, it should not be overlooked that congregants clearly give their consent to micro-political features at Riverstane. This is a theme which recurs from time to time in the minister's sermons and pastoral letters, such as in the following extract from the church magazine:

I sometimes get close to despairing, and wonder if those of you with lively minds and bright ideas and energy, but with little time because you are so busy elsewhere, will just stop waiting for an all-clear or other signal from me or my wife or the Kirk Session or the Session Clerk or the Secretary of the Ladies' Association, and put some of your ideas into gear and move the rest of us forward.

The implication of this seems to be that congregants are holding back. Informant E refers to this as a "participation gap":

"There's a participation gap. For example, people reading the Bible...It's very frustrating not being able to put your hand up and participate. It wouldn't be so bad if there was an opportunity to discuss things after the service...People should be able to meet and talk about the Bible...There's a lot of people who want to participate in things, but participation is getting to be a bad word. There's a block...We don't have discussions in Riverstane." (E.3.b.ii.4.a.v.b.iv.5.b.vi.).

There are indeed eminently able individuals in the congregation, many of whom are highly qualified people holding positions of professional responsibility, but the application of their "lively minds and bright ideas and energy" in the congregation seems to be suspended. However, as one elder who no longer goes to Riverstane puts it, "They don't really want able people." Another elder who no longer attends joined the kirk session on the understanding that active contribution was invited. However, he found himself being criticised by elders for having his say at the meetings, and commented:

"I couldn't believe the things that were going on. And I wasn't prepared to give the session a whole evening of valuable time, which I could hardly spare, just to sit there passively the way they wanted me to."

In keeping with this, those congregants who reject the passive, unquestioning role which is expected of them tend either to absent themselves from meetings (possibly accounting for the low attendance at the kirk session), or even to end their association with Riverstane altogether. Whatever its cause, the effect of de-skilling at Riverstane is to diminish the status of the individual within the congregation, and other factors in this respect are considered in the next section.

C. Social Incentive and Disincentive

Clearly, the various features of micro-political life at Riverstane occur with the consent of congregants, and this is in keeping with the commitment system of the congregation which entails an attachment to matters of tradition and status. Respect for tradition and status brings with it a disinclination to challenge the authority which such a commitment system invests in its leadership, so that the leaders become somewhat symbolic of the emphasis upon tradition and status. To challenge the leadership is to challenge the commitment system, and circumspection

involves, importantly, being careful about any publicly expressed criticism of it. Openly to challenge authority would be to demonstrate a lack of attachment to the commitment system, effectively stepping outside of it, and with the risk of becoming marginalised. This is a strong disincentive, for the insider who is seen to 'let the side down' is likely to have lower status than a complete outsider. Informants comment as follows:

"There hasn't been an uprising...because people are afraid to step out of line. You may be snubbed. Out...You wouldn't have a happy time if you stepped out of line. That's power...It's our own fault - either it's that we're cowards and we're afraid, or that we feel it's not our place to speak out. We're afraid not to be popular. One of the meetings I have to go to because I'm the minute secretary, and you don't speak unless you're asked something. There are atmospheres attached to every meeting, and so it's not a free meeting. Whenever Riverstone people are involved, I'm not a hundred percent relaxed. When you go into a meeting or a gathering and you feel, 'I have to be on my toes' - how can you possibly be relaxed?" (I.2.a.iii.4.a.iv.).

"To tell you the truth, the ladies on the committee don't have much say...It's put 'as if' a suggestion, but pity help anybody who didn't agree. You'd be in trouble. That's where we go wrong and I blame myself. The people on the committee should take a stand. Any committee I've been on outwith the church, at the meetings I've always had my say. But I don't know what it is about the ladies' association. I suppose you don't want to be out on a limb. But that's no excuse. I blame myself...If I or anybody else stood up and disagreed strongly with [the minister's wife], the rest of them would take her side. So you don't want to rock the boat. It's outside the meetings you get the murmurings. But if you took a stand you would lose some people you thought were your friends. I'm not prepared to stand up to that now." (N.3.a.iii.).

"They're protecting their position. People are scared they'll lose their own credibility - that they'll be seen as a traitor...They can do a lot to hurt you. You can be ostracised, cut out, cut away...It's a commitment when you join - like a marriage - and it's not easy to go back on it...You don't make life difficult for yourself - it's difficult enough already. It's difficult to contemplate stepping out into the cold." (T.1.b.vi.ix.c.v.).

Informant I refers to the social disincentive of snubbing and being 'out', and there is an awareness of status in the suggestion that "we feel it's not our place to speak out." On the theme of being 'out', informant T speaks of being "a traitor...ostracised, cut out, cut away," and uses the language of stepping outwith the commitment system: "It's a commitment when you join...It's not easy to go back on it...It's difficult to contemplate stepping out into the cold." Also, the effect of de-skilling is alluded to by informant N: "Any committee I've been on outwith the church, at the meetings I've always had my say." Social disincentive is further reflected in the references to being "afraid not to be popular" (informant I), not wishing "to be out on a limb" (informant N), and not making "life difficult for yourself" (informant T). The power of the disincentive is apparent in statements such as, "You wouldn't have a happy time if you stepped out of line" (informant I), "Pity anybody who didn't agree" (informant N), and "They can do a lot to hurt you" (informant T). However, in giving their consent to these aspects of the micro-politics, there also seems to be a sense of dissonance: "It's our own fault" (informant I), and "I blame myself" (informant N). Since congregants are by definition unable to "take a stand" (informant N) so as to alter the micro-politics, this further reinforces the effect of de-skilling.

This pressure to conform, as a feature of the micro-politics in the congregation, is also partly driven by social reward. One form of such incentive is in being spoken to or smiled at by the minister and his wife, as another way of publicly allocating status. The corresponding social punishment is in being looked past, or getting a stony face:

"[The minister's wife] walks past you and very obviously not speaking to you." (D.2.a.iv.).

"You smile and they don't smile back. [The minister's wife] - I've never seen her smile to me. Some people get a smile and others don't." (C.2.a.iv.).

Newcomers to the congregation are typically unaware of the cultural significance of smiles they might receive, or in being spoken to, which can lead them to make cultural errors. Informant A comments on being criticised, shortly after becoming a member at Riverstane, for taking the initiative in this connection:

"She said to me, 'You're always going up to [the minister's wife]. I said, 'If [the minister's wife] speaks to me, I speak to her.'" (A.4.a.ii.).

Social reward through smiles and being spoken to appears to be a strong motivator for some congregants in demonstrating their attachment to the commitment system at Riverstane.

It is important to note that such means of social reward and punishment is not restricted to the minister and his wife, but is found more generally in the micro-politics of the congregation. This is reflected in comments that were quoted in Chapter Five with regard to social segmentation:

"Certain individuals walk in and look neither to the left nor to the right." (O.2.b.vii.).

"People do look at you with unseeing eyes." (J.2.b.i.).

"You'd never dream of making a joke with them in case they looked through you." (K.1.a.vi.).

"It's the funny people - they don't speak to folk." (D.2.a.i.).

"Some people just look at you as if to say, 'How do you know me?' and don't say 'Good morning,' back." (C.1.a.vii.).

In contrast to ordinary social segmentation, this becomes micro-political when people are deliberately ignored, not 'seen', not 'heard', not acknowledged, or when their greetings are not reciprocated. It becomes micro-political when, for whatever reason, there is an intentionality about not speaking to people, as opposed to being naturally diffident or reticent towards those who do not already belong to the same social circle. Informant O admits this:

"Like others, I have made a lot of very good friends in the congregation. There are some very fine people in the congregation. There are others in the congregation

to whom I do not address a single word, and in a good Christian way do not intend to address a single word." (O.2.b.vii.).

The reference to "a good Christian way" suggests that while the intention to avoid speaking with some people is a matter of status economics, nevertheless no harm is intended by it.

A final note with regard to the public allocation of status is that this is also associated with being chosen for the office of eldership, so that it too has the function of being a social incentive:

"It's seen as a feather in your cap to be an elder...In other churches they don't see themselves as anything because they're elders. But to be an elder at Riverstane..." (L.1.a.iv.3.b.i.).

"Being an elder is being recognised as something in the church - you've been asked on to the session and it's a great privilege." (E.2.a.ii.).

"When I became an elder, somebody said to me that he thought I must have had influence." (F.4.b.iii.).

"There are too many elders strutting about because they're elders of Riverstane. Some of them only become elders so they can say they're elders at Riverstane. And they only come when they're on duty." (I.5.c.iii.).

"I've only just discovered there's a pecking order between the elders' teams. It's social. There's the socially acceptable team - the one I'm in - and the others." (O.2.c.i.).

Given that there are no women elders, and if status is associated with eldership, then this seems to disadvantage women in the status economy of the congregation. On this point, informant G comments:

"The place of women in the organisations is right down on the floor. And if there's a basement, there too...They're good for making tea, for washing up, and for the shop." (G.5.a.i.).

As a result, being chosen to join the kirk session does not act as a social incentive for women in the congregation with regard to the public allocation of status.

This part of the chapter has considered the economics of status at Riverstane in terms of the micro-politics of the congregation, as found in meetings, the public allocation of status, the de-skilling of individuals, and social incentive and disincentive. The second part of the chapter now turns to the role of boundaries in relation to status.

II. Boundaries as Demarcations of Status

Social segmentation implies the presence of boundaries by which different groupings are separated from each other, and these function to define the limits or criteria of membership within the social segments. As Anthony Cohen explains, these boundaries are themselves part of the symbol system of a community (1987: 14):

Many of the elements which constitute the boundary may not be objectively apparent at all but, rather, exist in the minds of their beholders...But to say that community boundaries are often symbolic in character is not only to suggest that they imply different meanings to different people. It also suggests that boundaries perceived by some may be utterly imperceptible to others.

Given the status economy at Riverstane Church, in such a context symbolic boundaries have the function of demarcating differences in status. In Chapter Five (on pages 185-186 above), the threshold of the building was described as an arena of potential conflict due to the door policy of excluding tourists who do not intend to stay for the worship service. In other words, the church threshold forms a symbolic boundary which, though visible, has the invisible function of defining the status of those who are admitted in terms of being worshippers, differentiating this from the status of those who are not staying for the service, and in turn delimiting the two groups of people. Because the boundary is symbolic, and therefore has an invisible significance, those who come up against it do so unwittingly and as a result can be surprised to find themselves in the

position of being asked to leave the building. Aspects of the church building as symbolising status will be returned to at the end of this chapter.

A. Interpersonal Boundaries

As Peter Stromberg comments (quoted earlier on page 209 above), commitment to a symbol involves a relationship "that is so close that a threat to the symbol is likely to be felt as a threat to the self" (1985: 13). As a result symbolic boundaries can become a locus of conflict. However, boundary maintenance at Riverstane relates not only to the building but also to the social segmentation, and ultimately comes down to the level of personal boundaries. Accordingly, congregants can find that their personal boundaries are arenas of conflict which they sometimes have to defend. Informants comment as follows:

"You always end up having to justify yourself, to assert. You shouldn't have to...If there's been a verbal punch-up I come home and feel the stress of that." (T.1.b.viii.c.ii.).

"When we first went to Riverstane...we got a lovely welcome...But when you began to see what was happening it gave you a shock...You don't lift a tray without permission. And you don't go into the kitchen without being invited." (I.3.a.v.).

"Rows are given out all the time - you don't do anything unless you're told to do it...I've been a victim of being told I've done the wrong thing without it being explained to me. They just want to show their authority." (C.2.a.i.5.a.iv.).

"If you don't do it, you're wrong, but if you did do things you'd get a row." (D.5.a.iv.).

Informant T refers to a feature of the micro-politics at Riverstane which is the "verbal punch-up", and which can occur when a symbolic boundary is crossed. It might be, as informant I comments, the boundary of the kitchen in the church hall, or of touching an ordinary object that is for some reason is 'out of bounds' to the individual concerned.

Informant C indicates that being given a row is a feature of the micro-politics around symbolic boundaries, and this can be partly a matter of establishing status: "They just want to show their authority." On this point, informant C describes the double-bind of people getting a row no matter what they do.

In view of the above, it is perhaps not surprising that some congregants take the view of informant L: "I try to keep away from church politics" (L.5.a.iii.). However, it is not possible to be an insider at Riverstane without inevitably being caught up in micro-politics. Informant E comments:

"People chase other people to get noticed. But you know the minute your back's turned they'll shaft you. Nine times out of ten I look on these things as a source of amusement. The long association there means you're not so vulnerable to the slings and arrows... It's horrible when you see it happening to people." (E.4.a.iii.).

At the level of interpersonal boundaries, the micro-politics is often expressed (to use a phrase associated with Eric Berne) in the games people play. One of the most common status games at Riverstane might be given the title 'Did You Know?', which has the function of letting people know that they are not in the know. This happens when a person might wish to demonstrate higher status by 'springing', as opposed to sharing, information by prefacing it with the words, "Did you know...". As informant E comments:

"The politics keep people moving. It doesn't let them get too settled - puts the pepper on the tail. The result is that people want to know what's going on - and if they feel left out they get resentful." (E.4.a.i.).

A variation of this is in a game which can be given the title 'You'll Find Out'. This happens when a person is, deliberately or routinely, not told about something which directly affects them in some way, as informant O describes:

"On Sunday I saw [a lady] at Riverstane for the first time in a year. She asked me for a lift home. It was then she told me that her husband had been ill. Very ill. I'm their elder and nobody told me. I am dismayed." (O.2.a.ii.).

Another game, which is effective in tracing the boundaries between segments within the congregation, can be given the title 'You're Invited - You're Not Invited'. This relates to parties and other social occasions, and is described by the following informants:

"Things go on in the congregation which you're never invited to...People don't know why they're invited to these things, or to the manse, or why they're not invited. The way things come out can be awkward. Sometimes you find out later about things which have since passed." (A.1.a.ii.).

"People are hurt through being missed out in invitations. If they can't ask everyone then they shouldn't have it at all. You feel, 'Am I not good enough?'...And when you are invited it's like the secret service - you never get to know who's going except by accident." (I.1.a.vii.).

There are various other games, and in common with the above examples they are all to do with publicly marking out differences in status at the level of interpersonal boundaries. One last example here is probably one of the most frequently played games at Riverstane, and can be given the title 'Jerking The Lead'. Typically, this involves one person calling the name of another person either from behind to make them stop and turn round, or to make them stop on the way past. The prevalence of this game is facilitated by the scale of the building, with the large expanse of the nave flanked by massive pillars.

Having considered the idea of interpersonal boundaries as demarcations of status, the next section brings the chapter to a close by turning to the church building itself as the symbolic boundary demarcating the status between insiders and outsiders.

B. The Church Building as Symbolic Boundary

The most visible of the symbolic boundaries at Riverstane is the church building itself, and there the expression of

status is on an impressive scale, a phenomenon which Keith MacDonald (1989) describes in an article with the title 'Building Respectability'. With regard to the styles of corporate headquarters as chosen by various professional bodies, he interprets them as (55):

signs of success, respectability and standing, so that their clients or patients will take them at their own evaluation and trust them, with their bodies, their money, their property, their minds or their souls.

He notes that one of the means by which groups have traditionally enhanced their standing in the community is "to erect impressive buildings - churches, town halls, guild halls, palaces and mansions" (57). He points to examples in which organisations have set out to obtain "a building whose appearance is imposing and which evidently cost money, either by its ornamentation...or by its grandeur" (76).

If the grandeur of a building is an index to the status of the organisation which occupies it, then for Riverstane Church to be associated with such a building would seem likely to put status almost unavoidably on the agenda of congregational culture. One of MacDonald's observations is that one of the features associated with this is visible extravagance, for example on (76):

paintings, sculpture, stained glass, frescoes, tapestry, antiques, ancient books, etc. all of which are patently expensive and in some cases irreplaceable. They also display in one form or another the wasted space that in terms of conspicuous consumption is the counterpart of the massive or decorative exterior.

He also notes that these have particular impact if they are combined with a ritual function. On all these counts, the Riverstane building is infused with status. This makes some sense of the otherwise puzzling £350,000 spent on the unsuccessful visitor centre project, and the £380,000 spent on renovating the church organ (noted on page 175 above).

As one interviewee remarked:

"Suddenly there was ambition with the visitor's centre. People were poo-pooed when they tried to raise objections about it and the maintenance of it...The organ is going the same way. But the snobs and

musicologists insisted on it...But to maintain that organ will cost a lot of money - and you can't spend £400,000 pounds and not maintain it...I'll never know how we were talked into raising all that money [for the visitor centre]. The [minister and his wife] got carried away with the idea. It became something apart from the church altogether." (L.2.a.ii.iii.b.i.).

The grand scale of the visitor's centre project and its subsequent failure is a subject of such sensitivity that it is rarely mentioned in public and only reluctantly in private. On this point, informants comment:

"Many people would share my view that they're very disappointed with what they got at the visitor centre. If I'd known...I wouldn't have put a penny piece in it." (O.2.a.vi.).

"What happened with that museum was the most dreadful disgrace...When I think of how hard everybody worked for that. We got to the stage where we were sick and tired putting our hands in our pockets. We never heard what happened to our money. You just felt that you had been robbed." (I.5.c.ii.).

"The [visitor centre] is like a sore toe to a lot of people. The bit Riverstane has in the basement is like a glorified dunny [outside toilet]. When I look at the plaque with all the names of those who made donations, I think there must be a lot of disappointed people." (E.1.a.v.).

These comments illustrate some of the dissonance which can result from the commitment to status at Riverstane.

Conclusion

This chapter has closed Part Two of the thesis by considering the micro-political character of the commitment to status at Riverstane Church. This relates to the role of meetings in the public allocation of status, the associated de-skilling of individuals, features of social reward and punishment, and the symbolic boundaries which demarcate status not only at the interpersonal level, but also in terms of the church building itself.

Part Three of the thesis will reflect upon the ethnography in Part Two in such a way that, while being dependent upon it, nevertheless abstracts from the situation so as to make statements of a broader nature. The maintenance of status in the micro-politics at Riverstane Church, the function of boundaries, and the related questions of exclusivity and inclusivity, are all germane to the theme of congregational mission, and these are matters of practical theological significance that will be turned to in the next chapter.

PART THREE

Boundaries, Mission, and the Pastoral Context

Churches at the Boundary: Congregational Mission

Introduction

Part One of this thesis discussed the relationship between hermeneutics, ethnography, and congregational studies in Practical Theology, and Part Two was an ethnographic account of congregational culture at Riverstane Church. Part Three now introduces practical theological reflection upon themes arising from the material presented in Part Two, and in so doing begins to abstract from the ethnographic account while also being dependent upon it. That is, the reflection is more in a divergent rather than a convergent mode.

There are two reasons for this. The first is that practical theological reflection upon a specific field setting is of limited scope except insofar as it has relevance to other settings. As a result, on the basis that every congregation is in certain respects like all other congregations, like some other congregations, and like no other congregation, the approach here is to abstract from the situation at Riverstane Church so as to make statements of more general relevance. This is not to argue from the particular to the general, but is instead a matter of spotting the general in the particular (Bauman, 1978: 218). The second reason arises from the ethnographic premise that the researcher is present in the field setting as a cultural outsider seeking to benefit from the local knowledge of those who are insiders, so that to make detailed proposals for change in the setting would be somewhat inconsistent with that position. However, this is not to say that the researcher's horizon is unimportant, and so it is legitimate to make broader proposals which go beyond the particularity of Riverstane Church that are based upon theological critique.

For these reasons, Chapters Eight and Nine will refer back to the ethnographic account presented in Part Two with a view to making statements of a wider nature, reflecting upon the larger theological significance of central themes arising from congregational culture at Riverstane Church. With that in mind, it will be helpful briefly to review these themes in the first part of this chapter. The second part of the chapter considers the cultural obstacles to congregational mission at Riverstane, and the third part proposes the New Testament concept of philoxenia, or hospitality to strangers, as a proximate goal which can be the beginning point for congregational mission in such a setting, and which can have potential for transformation.

I. Characteristic Features of Congregational Culture

A digest of the material presented in Part Two is summarised in the sections which follow, under the headings of differentiability, difference, deference, and dissonance. To avoid reduplication, few citations of supporting extracts from ethnographic interviews are included here. As a result, the voice of the researcher is more prominent than that of congregants, and the flesh and blood of the ethnography is reduced to the bones of what can be regarded as characteristic features of congregational culture.

A. Differentiability

Congregational culture is not to be confused with the idea of consensus, reducing culture superficially to the question of patterns and commonalities, and obscuring the normal diversities which are present in any community of people. Shared aspects of congregational life are indeed bound up with culture, but it is in the diversity of meanings which people attach to them that much cultural information lies.

1. Symbols

Churches, perhaps more than some settings, are replete with symbolism, religious and otherwise. It probably goes without saying that any congregation is associated with a great deal of Christian symbolism, but the issue is not so much its presence but rather the ways in which congregants relate to it. Further, as is the case at Riverstane, a great deal of the symbolism in a church may be other than directly Christian. And just as the Christian symbolism is not all in the form of inanimate objects, but for example can be located in the words and movement associated with the services of worship, so the other symbolism which is not specifically Christian can be either concrete or intangible.

People derive a sense of communal identity through attachment to their symbol system, albeit with differing meanings, and this is what lies behind the symbolic construction of community, to use Anthony Cohen's terminology (1985). At an informal level, membership of the community is dependent upon sharing such an attachment, and not to share it is by definition to be outside of that community. At Riverstane Church it appears that different congregants relate to the richly symbolic services of worship in different ways. For some, the specialised organ and choral music is a main attraction. They appreciate it and understand it. By contrast, other congregants are more ambivalent about the music. Similarly, people are variously approving or equivocal, and comprehending or unclear, about the prayers, the sermons, the texts of canticles, the liturgy, the standing and the sitting.

Commitment to tradition and status are powerfully symbolic features which pervade the life of the congregation. Tradition relates to architecture, history, music, worship, and polity at Riverstane. Congregants variously appreciate certain aspects of tradition more than they do others, but

it would not be possible to be a cultural insider without having some attachment to what in its own rhetoric is explicitly called 'tradition'. Again, people might relate in various ways to matters of status in terms of wealth, seniority, social class and precedence, the monarchy and honours system, the military, political affiliation with the Conservative Party, or association with prestigious institutions, but it is not possible as an insider either to have neutral status or to be outwith its ambit. Tradition and status meet in the highly symbolic character of the church building. Its mediaeval gothic architecture, its imposing dimensions, and its historic role as by far the oldest church in the city are indices of the traditional and the prestigious, and these are mirrored culturally in the congregation gathering there.

2. Social Segmentation

The congregation is differentiated not only with regard to the commitment system but also in its social segmentation. Again, matters of status play a key role with regard to who associates with whom and sometimes who speaks with whom. Social segmentation is most clearly evident in the way people gather inside the church and the clusters they tend to form before and after services. Those who belong to one cluster may not know the names of some people in another. It is also reflected in who might be present at social occasions outwith church on a Sunday. There is nothing necessarily unusual in this except the degree to which people of different groupings tend not to mix. It is important to note, however, that there are individuals in the congregation who clearly do make the attempt to speak to people other than just those in their own circle, and this is something which should not be overlooked. Nevertheless it is fair to say that such crossover is relatively exceptional. As a result, congregants can refer at the same

time both to the friendliness and to the unfriendliness of Riverstane people without necessarily being inconsistent.

B. Difference

If the concept of differentiability is concerned with the relationships between people within the congregation, then the concept of difference is more to do with the relationships between insiders and outsiders.

1. Being 'Different'

For a community to have a sense of self, it suggests a sense of being distinct from other social groups. Cohen makes the following comment regarding the concept of 'community' (1987: 14):

The term thus seems to imply simultaneously both similarity and difference; hence its relational character: it suggests the opposition of the community to others or to other social entities.

At Riverstane, this sense of distinctiveness can sometimes be seen in an oppositional posture which is coupled with a sense of being special and important. This is reinforced by the exceptional nature of the building not only through its architecture and antiquity but also on account of its ownership, uniquely for a church, as crown property, so that the congregation is in the unusual position of having no burden of expense with regard to the substantial maintenance programme for the building, the cost of which is met in its entirety by the state.

Whether intended or not, this distinctiveness reinforces a note of exclusivity which accompanies the emphasis upon status. It can be expressed in 'playing the vis-à-vis' towards other social entities, in which the church may seem to present itself as different for the sake of being different, leading to a degree of isolation. Even in the

normal Sunday morning service, its own idiosyncrasies and departures from conventional Church of Scotland practice are well sufficient to disorient the ordinary visitor.

2. Symbolic Boundaries

Given that a sense of communal identity arises from attachment to the symbol system, this in turn posits the presence of boundaries marking out what the members of the community hold in common with each other as opposed to other social groups. It is important to emphasise here that boundaries are necessary, both in the sense of being indispensable and of being an inherent component of social reality, and this is a point that will be returned to below (on page 277). Further, as Cohen explains, these boundaries are themselves symbolic in character (1987: 14, 16):

We might see the essential meanings of the community... as invested in its boundaries, those ideas which discriminate the community from other places and groups...boundaries might be regarded as symbolic entities...Moreover, the symbolic character of the boundary - its location in the mind - often accounts for its invisibility to outsiders. It may be a useful invisibility, for if outsiders are unaware of it, they cannot attack or subvert it.

As these are symbolic, it is not possible to be regarded as a cultural insider while also appearing to trample over its boundaries. Obviously, the threshold of the door is by definition a visible boundary, yet it has a symbolic significance which is somewhat invisible. Because of the door policy at Riverstane of keeping tourists out before and during church services, unless they wish to stay for the whole service, this is a boundary which can be an arena of some conflict. There are office-bearers who express their discomfort with this, but they would rather choose to avoid 'door duty' than be seen to flaunt the policy. That is, as insiders, while relating differentially to the symbolic boundary, significantly they nevertheless leave it alone.

Tourists and other visitors who do come in for the service encounter a further boundary which marks them off as being separate from Riverstane people. Outsiders are conspicuous because they are strangers or foreign-looking, and since the social segmentation of the congregation makes it difficult to assimilate visitors or newcomers who do not already have a circle of friends there, they tend to be left standing around on their own. It seems that the different groupings of congregants who form clusters inside the church have in turn their own symbolic boundaries, both affecting the degree to which people mix with each other and also leaving visitors in the somewhat isolated position described. Again, it is important to note that there are members of the congregation who do indeed take the initiative to speak to visitors. However this is not quite so straightforward as it seems, since others appear to 'delegate' this role conveniently to those particular congregants who are prepared to do it. Also, since visitors are typically polite and unsuspecting, they may be vulnerable to any individuals in the congregation who might tend to overstep personal boundaries by imposing themselves upon strangers.

What the various boundaries at Riverstane have in common is their function in demarcating status. Boundaries demarcate outsider from insider, and the outsider has different status. Boundaries also demarcate insider from insider, and the insiders do not all share the same status. The very building is itself a boundary demarcating Riverstane Church from the outside community, a building which powerfully symbolises status on an impressive scale.

C. Deference

One of the most definitive features of Riverstane culture is the degree to which congregants defer to authority and status, including the public allocation of status. It is

not possible to be an insider without maintaining an attitude of subordination to authority. If people are uncomfortable with some area of congregational life, they typically give it their public consent while expressing any misgivings only privately. It may happen that people will acquiesce by default instead of giving vocal agreement but, however tacitly, congregants manifestly choose to give their assent to the way things are done at Riverstane.

In this connection, one interviewee commented, "People are very circumspect" (O.2.c.iv.). That is, congregants are careful not to challenge authority (such as the kirk session, or the finance committee, or the leader of an elders' section, or the minister, or the minister's wife) even if they perceive grounds for doing so. For someone openly to question this or any area of Riverstane practice and procedure would by definition be to place that person outwith the commitment system. Typically, deference to authority and the rhetoric of tradition effectively foreclose the possibility of genuine discourse at Riverstane.

Congregants defer to status not only in the sense of bowing to it (sometimes literally) but also in accepting its publicly allocated nature, so that insiders give their consent to being assigned their status in relation to others. Again, privately some congregants may prefer to eschew this, but in the course of congregational life they nevertheless observe the symbolic boundaries which function to demarcate status. Some might steer around these boundaries where possible through avoiding certain social situations, yet by leaving things alone they are still giving a form of assent. One such situation is in the context of committee meetings, where the status which is publicly allocated to individuals becomes prominent.

D. Dissonance

It was noted above that the symbolic boundary represented by the threshold of the door is one arena of conflict. The conflict lies not only in the experience of tourists who may be turned away at the door, but also in the sense of dissonance experienced by congregants who perceive a discrepancy between such a door policy and the identity of Riverstane as a Christian church. The consequence of this might be a tendency for some to suppress their awareness in order to diminish the sense of conflict. As informant T comments:

"When you get people on their own they're all right. But it's when they get into this group situation - then they're afraid to admit what they think." (T.1.b.vi.).

This might lead to a situation of false consciousness, whereby some congregants could be inclined to self-alienation rather than jeopardise their position as cultural insiders.

The above example is part of a more general sense of dissonance regarding the micro-politics. As a feature of its social processes which can sometimes be hurtful to people, congregants are aware that it is inconsistent with the identity of the church as a Christian community. In addition, dissonance surrounding Christian identity is found in other respects such as in the lack of biblical teaching, as well as an absence of congregational mission, which will be considered further in the next part of the chapter. One congregant remarked in conversation: "We don't seem to be as Christian as we used to be." Some congregants also express dissonance at the obvious delimiting of the congregation in the social segmentation which accompanies its symbolic boundaries. Again, the extent to which this partitions the congregation is perceived to be in tension with Christian ideals of community, which incorporates values of reconciliation and the breaking down of walls of separation

(as expressed, for example, in 1 Corinthians 1.10, Galatians 3.28, Ephesians 2.14).

Further, the sense of self as a bounded community with regard to the outside world, in which Riverstane sees its differentness as being special and important, leads to a dissonance in view of the obviously failing resources of the congregation. This is partly in terms of its declining and aging membership, with an almost complete absence of congregants under the age of forty, so that Riverstane people are uncomfortably aware of the lack of a proper Sunday School or any youth organisations, since there are virtually no children and strictly no young adults. Failing resources are also manifest in terms of the congregation's financial difficulties with regard to income from offerings over expenditure, as opposed to its highly substantial reserve funds. In addition, the sense of being special and important sets up other dissonance on account of the relative isolation of the congregation and its oppositional posture vis-à-vis other social entities such as is reported, for example, in connection with the women's group (noted on page 229 above).

There is nothing exceptional about communities having boundaries, since these are essential to the development of a collective sense of self. Boundaries are necessary to delimit where we begin and where we end. It is because of boundary that interaction can take place, and the blurring of boundaries entails a lack of definition regarding identity. But, paradoxically, while symbolic boundaries at Riverstane can lead to conflict because of their relative impermeability, dissonance may also arise from boundaries which in other respects are perhaps too permeable. As a building which is in certain important respects essentially a public space, and through which there is a constant stream of strangers in the form of visitors and tourists, it is hardly surprising if the congregation has a need to

strengthen its boundaries in order to preserve a collective sense of self.

Also, the function of Riverstane as a civic temple means that outside bodies frequently convene at Sunday morning services for their annual 'kirking'. Again, there is nothing necessarily problematic about this - as one congregant commented in conversation, "If they're going to go to some church, it might as well be us" - except that, to a large extent, the groups in question tend to be made the focus of the sermons and prayers, and can even seem to dominate the occasion. Again, this is likely to contribute to the strengthening of boundaries within the congregation. Ironically, because of the many Sundays of the year which take the form of these services, the sense of Riverstane being special and important as the church to which these prestigious groups traditionally come is further reinforced.

Finally, the arena of personal boundaries is also one in which something of a breach can be experienced. In the micro-political life of the congregation, personal boundaries can be encroached through routine de-skilling or infantilising of individuals, the status games which people play, the ever-present carrot and stick of social reward and punishment, and the bullying and autocratic behaviour associated with particular meetings and people. Again, some congregants have a sense of dissonance at the incongruity they perceive between such micro-political behaviour and what they would otherwise expect in a Christian congregation. However, it would still appear that in a real sense congregants choose to allow this situation to obtain.

Boundaries, then, of whatever nature, are arenas of conflict at Riverstane. The issue is not whether or not they exist, but rather how congregants interact with their necessary symbolic boundaries, particularly in relation to people on the other side of the boundary, either as insiders who are

socially partitioned from each other or as outsiders who do not belong to the congregation. But discussion of boundaries, particularly those which lie between insider and outsider, is germane to the matter of congregational mission, and this is the theme which will now be considered.

II. Congregational Culture versus Congregational Mission

In a chapter with the title 'The Study of Culture', Robert Schreiter (1985) affirms the importance of listening to a culture before trying to speak to it in the construction of local theologies. He makes the comment (45):

Listening to a culture in the interests of local theology means being able to listen also for the dissonances that mark the advent or progression of change. These cannot be arbitrarily tuned out. There is often a tendency to do so for the stability of the community.

The dissonances at Riverstane Church relate primarily to its symbolic boundaries, not only as the interface between insiders with regard to its social segmentation, and as the interface between insiders and outsiders who enter the building, but also as the interface between the congregation and the outside community. On this point, informants comment:

"We don't participate in the community, like having self-help groups. Parish work. There should be meetings in the church every night...I'd like to see some kind of crusade which Riverstane takes up. The kirk session needs to spend some time in [another congregation, which has a developed programme of community involvement]." (E.3.b.ii.4.b.iii.).

"And we don't do anything for anybody else. You've got the [night shelter] down there, and how often do we do anything for them?" (K.3.b.i.).

"We never hear about Christian Aid or our missionaries. There's no sense of mission." (R.1.d.vi.).

"Sometimes I wonder, should Riverstane be taking more to do with the people in the vicinity? Do we have some sort of responsibility? When they were raising funds for the centre, I thought it would have been a kind of

community centre for the local people. As far as the session is concerned, I'd be surprised if anybody was interested." (F.6.b.v.).

There might be a number of reasons why a congregation may experience, as Riverstane does, a lack of people crossing the symbolic boundary between being outsiders and becoming insiders. There might be local reasons, demographic reasons, or wider societal reasons. The fact that the building is itself in a somewhat marginal location in the city must contribute to this. In terms of position, it is on the eastern fringe of the city centre, sectioned off by a busy main road, and with limited parking facilities in the immediate vicinity, leaving it in an isolated situation and lacking convenient access. Also, as noted in Chapter Five (on page 171 above), it is in a largely depopulated area due to redevelopment of the district by the city council and the ongoing programme of improvements to the road system. Together with the volume of tourists and other incidental visitors who might be at Riverstane for a specific occasion or who are simply there out of interest, its physical alienation from the community as a city centre church would as a result seem likely to dispose the congregation towards strengthening its boundaries.

Accordingly, Riverstane Church is clearly not at fault for having strong boundaries. As was described earlier (on page 270 above), boundaries are necessary: both indispensable and inherent in social reality, and this is no less the case in religious communities. In Palestinian Judaism, for example, according to Edward Sanders (1977: 237) obedience to the Torah functioned to define those who were members of the covenant, and this is what he refers to as 'covenantal nomism': "continuing to accept the commandments demonstrates that one is 'in', while refusing to obey indicates that one is 'out'." As an extreme case, historically the community at Qumran is a striking example of a group which had rigidly defined boundaries, and where links with outsiders were

strictly regulated. On this point, Michael Knibb (1987: 108) cites an extract from Community Rule (1QS v.15-18):

No one shall eat or drink anything of their property, or take anything at all from their hand, except for payment, as it is written, 'Have no more to do with man in whose nostrils is breath, for what is he worth?' For all those who are not counted in his covenant, they and everything that belongs to them shall be kept separate.

Dean Kelley refers to this as "the power of the gate" (1977: 125). In connection with church groups, he writes:

They have only one means by which to preserve their purpose and character, and that is the power of the gate - to control who may enter and remain and on what conditions.

Kelley illustrates this with regard to certain features associated with the Anabaptist and Wesleyan movements. These include (125-126): "they were in no haste to take anyone into membership"; "the tests of membership were attitudinal and behavioral rather than solely or chiefly doctrinal"; and "membership was conditional upon continuing faithfulness". He adds (131): "social strength is proportionate to the difficulty of getting in and staying in and to the number of manifest distinctions between those who belong and those who do not." In its own ways, commitment to tradition and status are the counterparts to these at Riverstane in maintaining the integrity of its boundaries.

The claim being made here is that, whatever else may be involved in the non-assimilation of outsiders at Riverstane Church, a major factor relates to what takes place around the symbolic boundaries of congregational culture. Germane to this, Tom Allan describes "the problem of assimilation" of new members at North Kelvinside Parish Church in Glasgow (1984: 33). Georges Michonneau refers to the people outwith the church who are "Christifiable" but not yet "Ecclesiasticable" (1949: 5). With regard to the traditional parish congregation, John Harvey comments that "in the very manner, style and internal context of its being there, it seems to keep on erecting, or confirming, more

barriers than it can break down" (1987: 72). In a study of the Cardiff congregation at St Mark's Church, Diana Gregory comments (1990: 64):

the relatively low attendance of parish residents at Sunday services is of great concern and an analysis of socio-cultural differences may help to shed some light upon this problem. I would suggest...that the cultural milieu is not one [in] which parish residents, by and large, are likely to feel comfortable.

A similar church situation is described in an article by Thomas Fauchner with the title 'Outsiders Need Not Apply' (1992: 1566). In each of these instances, the focus is upon the cultural features of local churches which run counter to congregational mission.

Concepts vary with regard to what it means to be the church, partly depending on the local setting of a congregation. But most concepts will necessitate reference to the missionary nature of the church, and congregational mission of whatever nature directly engages in some way the community outwith the congregation. This perspective is summarised by David Bosch in his formidable survey of missiology, and its relevance to this discussion is such that it will be helpful to cite Bosch's summary here at some length (1991: 372-373, 378):

The church is seen as essentially missionary. The biblical model behind this conviction...is the one we find in 1 Peter 2.9...Its mission (its "being sent") is not secondary to its being; the church exists in being sent and in building up itself for the sake of its mission. Ecclesiology therefore does not precede missiology...It is a duty "which pertains to the whole Church". Since God is a missionary God...God's people are a missionary people...It has become impossible to talk about the church without at the same time talking about mission..."a church without mission or a mission without the church are both contradictions"...All this does not suggest that the church is always and everywhere overtly involved in missionary projects...: the church is both "missionary" and "missionizing". The missionary dimension of a local church's life manifests itself, among other ways, when it is a truly worshipping community; it is able to welcome outsiders and make them feel at home;...and it does not protect the privileges of a select group. However, the church's missionary dimension evokes intentional, that

is direct involvement in society; it actually moves beyond the walls of the church...The church-in-mission is, primarily, the local church everywhere in the world.

It is the "missionary dimension" of Riverstane as "a truly worshipping community...able to welcome outsiders and make them feel at home" which will be the theme of the final part of this chapter.

The particularity of Riverstane Church quite properly lends itself to ceremonial and civic occasions. As noted by a congregant cited earlier, "If they're going to go to some church, it might as well be us." This civic Christendom model of mission is a valid public role for churches partly to have. However, the proposal here is that while perhaps necessary for a church like Riverstane, the civic Christendom model is not sufficient. Roland Allen (1912), in discussing aspects of the apostle Paul's missionary method in terms of its general relevance beyond his own sociohistorical milieu, devotes a chapter to the social class of those to whom Paul took his message (28, 29, 34, 36):

In these days there is a strong and apparently growing tendency to lay great stress on the importance of directing attention to some particular class of people...Is it possible to maintain that St Paul established Christianity in the Four Provinces by enrolling in its service the gifts and influence of any particular important class of men? This would scarcely appear to be the case...Outside the synagogue St Paul does not seem to have addressed himself to any particular class...Thus it would appear that St Paul made no attempt to seek after any particular class of hearers. He had his place of preaching and addressed himself to all who would listen.

It is not that the function of Riverstane as a civic temple is in itself problematic; rather it is the absence of a corresponding engagement with the surrounding community which is open to theological critique, whereby there is "no attempt to seek after any particular class" of people. This is because, as Bosch notes (1991: 389), mission is ultimately the mission of God, and so should reflect the

nature of God. Without mitigating Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's statement that the inclusive character of the Jesus movement relates to the social categories of 'the poor' and 'the marginal' (1983: 141), then since it is in the nature of God not to be a 'respector of persons' (eg Acts 10.34, Romans 2.11, Ephesians 6.9, James 2.1-9), the missio Dei is not to "seek after any particular class" in preference to others, not least the social elite, and so is not restricted to certain sections of society.

The question then arises as to the cultural significance of those features at Riverstane which contribute to the non-assimilation of outsiders, and which are thereby countervailing to congregational mission, and this will now be considered below.

A. The Role of the Church Building

The proposal here is that the characteristic lack of mission at Riverstane is something which can be seen as the reflex of congregational culture. It is a culture where boundaries can become barriers, and which entails a status economy that tends by definition to be exclusive rather than inclusive. In certain respects the nature of the church building itself partly contributes to this. It was noted earlier that in view of the public quality of the building, as well as its isolated location in the city, the congregation would seem likely to strengthen its symbolic boundaries, and in that sense the congregation is arguably predisposed to having the kind of culture it has partly because of the kind of building it occupies.

1. Form and Function

Winston Churchill famously commented, "We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us" (James,

1974: 6869). In the context of churches, this is echoed by William Imes (1996: 37): "Space does shape us: it makes some things possible and limits or eliminates others." The principle that form follows function involves assessing the task or goals of a building prior to its design (Schein, 1988: 33). So, in the context of churches, the form of the building follows the function of the building as a setting for worship. However, it also happens that the worship space then has implications for what in turn takes place within it. In this sense it may be said that although, to begin with, form follows function, it then subsequently occurs that function follows form. We first shape our buildings, and then our buildings shape us. Accordingly, the form of the building can have potential implications for congregational culture.

This is particularly so at Riverstane Church because of the striking character of the building. As indicated above, its public function as a civic temple is entirely in keeping with its distinctive history and architecture, and this need not necessarily be in tension with the assimilation of outsiders. However, at Riverstane the rhetoric of being "the city church" as opposed to a parish church tends to give precedence to its ceremonial function over that of congregational mission as "direct involvement in society... beyond the walls of the church" (Bosch, 1991: 373).

Another way in which the building has implications for congregational culture relates to matters of status. In the previous chapter (on page 261 above), a sociological study by Keith MacDonald (1989) was cited in which the grandeur of building design, including churches, was traced as an index to the status of the organisations occupying them, and it was noted that the magnificence of Riverstane Church as a building would then seem likely to put status almost unavoidably on the agenda of congregational culture. However, the marked presence of a status economy in the

church is unlikely to be conducive to the assimilation of outsiders. As informant J comments, referring to perspective of most outsiders: "Their way of thinking is that everybody is as good as everybody else and you don't get on your feet for anybody" (J.2.a.vi.). The economics of status is also problematic with regard to the Christian identity of the congregation, and this is a point that will be returned to presently.

2. Form and Behaviour

The many tourists who visit Riverstane day by day typically record their enthusiastic comments in the visitors' book concerning the breathtaking impact of the building. Indeed, many of the congregants themselves comment on how the aesthetics of the building represents a large part of what draws them to Riverstane. Beyond aesthetics, however, it is also noticeable how the character of the space, its layout and its dimensions, affect the manner in which people relate to the surrounding structure - their movement through it and in certain respects their behaviour within it. The nave section gives a distinct sense of openness and vastness because of its sheer height and the expanse of the central floor area flanked by bays of large pillars. Standing on the flagstones, in spite of being indoors, there is yet an impression of being in a spacious, open place. In some respects it resembles an old quadrangle-like area, and this frames the social interaction within it. As was described earlier (on page 188 above), congregants tend to spread out not as a randomly distributed crowd but in twos, threes, and larger groups within the central area, or are seated along the length of a wall, or on wicker chairs backing on to pillars. These groups do not generally consist of people making neighbourly conversation with others who simply happen to be nearby, but are composed of affines forming groups which are somewhat in contradistinction to other groups. This limits the degree to which people mix,

particularly with regard to strangers who are often conspicuous through not belonging to any of the clusters, and as a result works against the assimilation of outsiders.

B. The Role of Micro-Politics

It was argued in the previous chapter that the micro-politics at Riverstane is predicated upon an economy of status which pervades the life of the congregation, whether in the context of meetings or in church on a Sunday. The claim being made here is that the function of status as the basic unit of micro-political currency at Riverstane runs directly counter to congregational mission.

1. The Status Economy

In any organisation there is nothing unusual about status being attached to those things which are the sources of power in the organisation, whether it be money, social class, or the authority associated with office. However, in a church setting this becomes problematic if those values collide with Christian values, and in the case of Riverstane the exclusive nature of its status economy is clearly in tension with congregational mission. On this theme, Rosemary Radford Ruether refers to the model of diakonia or service (1983: 207):

Diakonia is kenotic or self-emptying of power as domination. Ministry transforms leadership from power over others to empowerment of others...The call to ministry is not a call to become the passive supporter of the public order or the toady of the powerful in Church or society. Rather, ministry means exercising power in a new way, as a means of liberation of one another...Ministry overcomes competitive one-up, one-down relationships and generates relations of mutual empowerment.

At a fundamental level there is an incongruity about the values of status economics being prominent in a church setting. In the values of a koinonia community (Acts 2.42),

which is the model for all churches, predicated upon a kenotic, self-emptying Christology and a kerygma of gospel reversals in which status values become inverted (such as in the Magnificat of Luke 1.46ff and the so-called 'sermon on the plain' of Luke 6.20ff), there are no acceptable grounds for a marked emphasis upon status. Indeed, the passage describing the kenosis of Christ (Philippians 2.5-11) is preceded by the exhortation in verse 3, "in humility count others better than yourselves" (RSV).

The tendency towards exclusion such as is fostered by a status system becomes problematic in a Christian context where an inclusive ethic of agape as mutuality and equal regard is a normative ideal. In his discussion on this theme, Don Browning writes (1991: 171, 178):

The understanding of agape as equal regard suggests that the...congregation has every right within a Christian understanding to pursue its needs. [But] Its members do not have a right to do so inordinately. Their needs are no more important than those of others. The ethic of equal regard requires them to take the needs of others as seriously as their own. Even more, if there are clear and obvious imbalances, they are obligated to work on behalf of others...The Christian house church treated men, women and slaves with an ethic of mutuality and equal regard...There were, in the later Pastoral Letters, calls to return to the old Aristotelian hierarchies. But...the Pauline churches in Corinth, Rome, and elsewhere were quietly yet dangerously in tension with them.

In the context of Riverstane Church the economics of status is clearly in conflict with an agapeic ethic of mutuality and equal regard which would seek to correct "imbalances" of need, power, and justice.

However, the fact remains that there are natural social differences between congregants at Riverstane, a situation which, on the basis of the New Testament Haustafeln, also pertained to early Christian communities. On this theme, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1983: 78) draws attention to the concept of "love patriarchalism" as set out by Gerd Theissen "in order to explain the interaction of wealthy and

powerful people with those of lower status within the Christian communities of the Hellenistic world." It involves, in the name of agapē, the "willing acceptance of given inequalities" and the replication within the church of "the status inequalities and structural hierarchies typical of a patriarchal society." However, Fiorenza points out that Theissen imposes this model upon the text rather than deriving it as a Christian principle, and as such it does not commend itself as a guide for churches today. Instead, Fiorenza highlights "the basileia vision of Jesus as the praxis of inclusive wholeness" (118), and finishes with the statement that "Jesus called forth a discipleship of equals that still needs to be discovered and realized by women and men today" (154).

In the light of these statements, the excluding nature of the status economy at Riverstane Church runs counter to congregational mission not only because it acts as a barrier to outsiders, but also on theological grounds. Before discussing what might be involved in a theologically informed response to such a situation, this part of the chapter closes by considering how the micro-political processes at Riverstane interrelate and combine to maintain the status quo in the obstacles to congregational mission.

2. Self-Reinforcing Systems

A major feature at Riverstane is how little congregational culture has changed over several decades. One regular visitor to Sunday services commented on his impression that it is "stuck somewhere in the 1950s." Congregants who have been members for many years confirm this in their reminiscences. Although many people in the congregation were not there in the 1950s, such perpetuation of culture from generation to generation, regardless of the actual personnel involved, reflects how deeply embedded in the congregation its social processes are. In this connection,

it is possible to identify a number of self-reinforcing and mutually supporting cycles in the life of the congregation which would tend to perpetuate such a situation of status quo. At least three of these correspond to the cultural features categorised in the first part of this chapter under the headings of difference, deference, and dissonance.

In the cycle of difference, an awareness within the congregation that Riverstane is different from other churches, for example on account of its distinctive history and building, is conducive to having a sense of being special and important. However, this assumption of a superior position has a somewhat isolating effect in relation to other churches and social entities, and thereby serves further to reinforce an awareness of being different.

In the cycle of deference, an emphasis upon tradition and status, as reflected in the style of Sunday service at Riverstane and in its customary way of doing things, naturally appeals to those people who would tend to share values which are consistent with this. By the same token, those for whom such an emphasis has little or no appeal are less likely to be there. Hence the congregation tends to select for those who are likely to defer to the authority, status, and tradition which in turn continue to remain unquestioned.

In the cycle of dissonance, realities about the life of the congregation, such as the visibly declining membership and features of its micro-politics, set up something of a dissonance among congregants as individuals. In keeping with the deference cycle referred to above, which gives the benefit of the doubt to authority and tradition, people might choose to suppress their awareness through false consciousness, avoidance, or diversion. However, the effect of this is to neglect dealing with the reality in question which as a result continues to obtain.

These three cycles in the social processes at Riverstane Church appear to be interrelated. For example, it has already been noted that the deference cycle partly drives the dissonance cycle. It also seems that the difference cycle contributes to the dissonance cycle since the sense of being special and important conflicts with the reality of downward trends in the congregational statistics. Again, there is something of the deference cycle in the difference cycle, since the emphasis on status places greater value on being special and important rather than just an 'ordinary' church. However, it is not being claimed that these cycles represent a 'theory of everything' which can somehow account for all features of congregational life, but rather that they describe characteristics of Riverstane culture which run counter to congregational mission.

Beyond these, another cycle which can be identified relates to de-skilling. In the previous chapter (on page 250 above) it was noted that otherwise competent individuals in the congregation can become somewhat infantilised, such as in committee meetings. The effect of this de-skilling is to foster a dependency which in turn only serves further to de-skill. This cycle functions through deference, since ultimately congregants are in effect giving their consent to being de-skilled, and contributes to the dissonance cycle through the resulting sense of conflict which people report.

These cycles hold in common the overall tendency to sustain the status quo. With such a system of interrelated processes there, significant cultural change at Riverstane from generation to generation would seem likely to be inhibited. This in turn forms a kind of meta-cycle whereby a changing society meets an unchanging congregational culture, with the result that Riverstane becomes increasingly distant from the society which nevertheless continues to change. However, while the cultural obstacles to congregational mission at Riverstane may be mutually

reinforcing and combine to sustain a marked resistance to change, this does not mean there is no prospect for transformation. As Michael Northcott comments (1989: 195):

The failure of the church to be the church in mission to the world is no reason to abandon hope of the church becoming itself. Rather efforts for church renewal must be directed at creating gathered communities which demonstrate in their worship and life-style a Christian ethic of love, giving substance to the mission of God through the expression of that ethic amidst the groupings and structures of the world.

Having considered the lack of change in the cultural obstacles to congregational mission at Riverstane in terms of symbolic boundaries, micro-politics, and status economics, the final part of the chapter now discusses a possible theologically informed response in such a setting.

III. Congregational Mission as Philoxenia

In what follows, a programme for change in the specific setting of Riverstane Church, for reasons explained at the beginning, is not being proposed here. Instead, a more abstracted response based on matters of general theological significance is offered. The situation at Riverstane is such that for reasons arising out of its own particularity, the congregation's collective sense of self as a Christian community lacks a constructive connection with the guiding narratives of the faith, and in certain respects entails a collision between the two.

A. Congregations and Biblical Narrative

This idea of the collision of cultures can be found in H Richard Niebuhr's study of Christ and Culture. Mapping out five possible theological positions, he describes them as Christ against culture (the two completely in conflict), the Christ of culture (the two in no conflict whatever), Christ

above culture (culture not yet fulfilled in Christ, but progressing towards this ideal), Christ and culture in paradox (the two in a relationship of dialectical tension), and Christ the transformer of culture (culture as fallen but with the potential for reflecting the image of Christ).

In Chapter Three of this thesis (on page 111 above), James Hopewell's insightful modification of this typology in terms of congregational culture was noted (1988: 172-176), so that Christ becomes the transformer of congregational culture, or Christ and congregational culture exist in paradox, and so on. Although Niebuhr envisaged the five types as being mutually exclusive, Hopewell's modification insightfully allows for some alternation between them, since different modalities within congregational culture are constantly in play. Thus, sometimes "the person of Christ is reflected in and through what occurs" in congregational culture (the Christ of congregational culture). Sometimes congregational culture is teased "towards the promise of the kingdom" through "development toward a more adequate realization of the kingdom" (Christ above congregational culture). Sometimes congregational culture can be "dangerously but inextricably caught in evil," but even then, in other respects nevertheless "Christ is witnessed" (Christ and congregational culture in paradox). Finally, congregational culture can also undergo a radical realignment of "its nature to conform to the person of Christ" (Christ the transformer of congregational culture).

It is important to note that Hopewell excludes from his modification of Niebuhr's types the scenario of Christ entirely against congregational culture. This is not to say that aspects of congregational culture can never in part be antithetical to Christ, as indeed Hopewell recognises in the other scenarios, but rather that by definition no congregational culture can be in a totally oppositional relation to Christ, for then it would not even be nominally

Christian. But there can indeed be what George Stroup (1981) refers to as a collision of narratives, when certain aspects of congregational culture run counter to gospel story, and there can surely be no congregation where this is never the case. However, since the collision of narratives is a form of what Gadamer means by the fusion of horizons (Stroup: 219), it is a collision which can nevertheless offer the possibility for transformation (235).

The idea of congregational narrative being in correspondence with biblical narrative is taken up by Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon (1989) in their depiction of the church "as resident aliens, an adventurous colony in a society of unbelief" (49). They take both Old Testament and New Testament narrative of the people of God to be paradigmatic for the contemporary church (67): "Knowing who we are by the story of the power and purposes of God makes a difference". As described earlier (on page 285 above), the status economy at Riverstane collides with gospel story and this finds resonance in the narrative of 1 Samuel 8, in which the elders of Israel wish to conform their community to the societies around them by having the status of a monarchy: "that we also may be like all the nations" (v.20, RSV). By so conforming to the surrounding culture, Israel is rejecting God as their king (v.7). This reflects the complexity of their inheritance of the Promised Land, which as Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller explain, was not to be understood as privilege or property. Walter Brueggemann (1977: 45-70), in a chapter with the title 'Reflections at the Boundary', characterises the Promised Land as a gift, a temptation, a task, and a threat. He comments (53):

The land, the source of life, has within it seductive power. It invites Israel to enter life apart from covenant, to reduce covenant place with all its demands and possibilities to serene space apart from history, without contingency, without demand, without mystery.

There is a strong correspondence here between this episode in the narrative of the people of God and the situation at Riverstane with regard to the gift, temptation, task, and threat of their church building. As gift, the congregation is a free tenant in an extraordinary church owned by the state; as temptation, the building symbolises status on an impressive scale and invites their capitulation to matters of status; as task, they have to justify their continued presence in the building by surviving as a congregation; and as threat, it continually attracts strangers and there is even the possibility that some day it might become occupied by another congregation or no congregation. Senior and Stuhlmuehler (1983: 87) describe Israel's election in terms of:

promises and gifts to be held as loaned and borrowed, never as possessed and owned, as signs of love rather than indications of power, as goods to be shared instead of riches to be hoarded and defended.

These words could equally describe at Riverstane the congregation's position in relation to the church building, with the implication that congregational mission becomes a matter of "goods to be shared instead of riches to be hoarded and defended."

Just as, in 1 Samuel 8, Israel wishes to be more like the surrounding culture, so at Riverstane the impulse is for congregational culture to mirror the emphasis upon status which obtains in wider society, with the 'city church' becoming somewhat like the surrounding civic community in this respect. As informant E comments:

"The church seems to be going along with so many things in the world when it should be fighting against them. It's not a Christian intellectual gathering, it's just an intellectual gathering and it's been pandered to over the years at Riverstane." (E.2.a.iv.).

However, this is part of what Hauerwas and Willimon (1989: 17) refer to as "Constantinianism", and which compromises the congregation's identity as a Christian community, since "the church, as those called out by God, embodies a social

alternative that the world cannot on its own terms know". On a similar theme, Michael Northcott refers to the "functional ecclesiology" which regards "the function of the church in society to be more central than the church's own being and life" (1989: 193). He links this with 1960s concept of the church as servant of the world, which "led to a loss of identity for the church." At Riverstane, the collision between congregational culture and the Christian "social alternative that the world cannot on its own terms know" suggests the need to reconnect with the narratives of the faith in a developed programme of Christian education. The question of what such an approach might entail in the setting at Riverstane Church will not be explored here. However, insofar as it relates to such situations more generally, the wider theme of hospitality to strangers as contained in the New Testament concept of philoxenia will now be considered in the final section of this chapter.

B. Boundaries and Hospitality to the Stranger

Senior and Stuhlmuehler refer to "the continual and inevitable dialectic between the call to mission and the... needs of the already gathered community," which results in an "inevitable balancing act between identity and mission" (1983: 340). This tension also lies behind Northcott's criticism of secularised theology in the literature of mission and ecumenical reports in the 1960s, producing a number of memorable slogans such as 'the church for others', 'the world sets the agenda', and 'the church inside out' (1989: 194). Another such phrase, still part of current usage, will be of particular relevance to this discussion on philoxenia. Its currency is reflected in the title of a recent publication, A Church Without Walls (1995), but no clue is given there to its origins in the literature. In fact it has a precursor in a 1968 publication, Church Without Walls (ed. Barnabas Lindars).

However, it can be traced back further to the chapter title 'Congregation Without Walls' in Horst Symanowski (1966), The Christian Witness in an Industrial Society. The phrase has a certain ambiguity, since it could refer either to the extra-mural activity of congregational mission or to the figurative removal of walls that separate the congregation inside from the community outside. Both ideas appear to present in the text of the chapter. In its dramatic and now dated language, he writes (97):

God always finds ways to move his church to the place at which it has to fulfil its commission. The church has often in its history balked at this commission and attempted to withdraw behind its walls in order to keep busy with itself alone. Then God battered down these walls, not with the intent of destroying the church, but, rather, to set it in motion once again toward the goal he had set for it...A Christian congregation must therefore not live self-sufficiently for itself. It gathers to listen to the Word of its Lord, but in the next minute it must disperse into the houses and neighbourhoods, the vocations and organizations, in order to pass on what was heard and to transmute it into action. This is continually happening with all of you! Moreover you remain a congregation throughout this process: you are never outside the church. You simply assume another form of the congregation of Jesus Christ, namely, the dispersed congregation, the Christian diaspora in the world.

The trope of 'a congregation without walls' is a useful expression of the idea that congregants are never outside the church, wherever they may go. In that sense the church is indeed without walls; it is not contained in or defined by buildings.

However, the limitations of the phrase as a rhetorical device become clear when Symanowski takes it further (108):

At which points can we still erect a wall in the congregation, around the congregation, or outside the congregation? The answer is, Nowhere, for if we do that, we cease to be a congregation. Nowhere may we seek security for ourselves; nowhere may we hide ourselves. God fetches us and brings us out to the place where he wants us to be: in the world in service...His congregation is no reservation for religiously inclined people, surrounded by walls and regarded by the world with either a friendly or a critically tolerant attitude...Therefore we all have

our hands full and have no time to devote to the construction of church walls. Where we nevertheless continue to raise them, God will tear them down as he has always done in the past.

Mike Lowe, in A Church Without Walls (1995), also uses the phrase both in the sense of extra-mural activity and of removing walls of separation. He is similarly impassioned in his conclusion (20):

William Temple has often been quoted, 'The Church is the only body that exists primarily for the benefit of those who are not its members.'...Emil Brunner once said, 'The church exists for mission as fire exists for burning.' The church that is truly the church does not need walls. If the fire at the centre is burning brightly, the flow will always be from the periphery to the heart. I make my final plea. What are the walls in place for - to keep the sheep in or to keep the goats out? Let us pull down those walls for the many...in our broken fragmented world who desperately need the good news of Jesus Christ.

In a more measured passage, referring to a church planting project which makes use of college premises, he writes (10):

In some ways one feels vulnerable as a church meeting in this context, with so much glass and so much access from outside and so many activities going on. However, surely this is what a church should be if it has a commitment to being a church without walls. In our beautiful Victorian parish church, we are safely ensconced behind high stone walls with beautiful stained glass. I do not wish at all in any way to deride such a building - it is a magnificent place for worship. However, it does have its negatives, and one of those is the inaccessibility to many who have never been 'churched'. I still wonder at the difficulty it is for an unchurched person to walk through the normal portal of a Victorian building.

This difficulty which people can experience when crossing the threshold of such a church building has an obvious resonance with the situation at Riverstane Church. Lowe is right to draw attention to the significance of the door. However, in doing so he too reveals the limitations of the rhetoric of 'a church without walls'. As was noted earlier (on page 270 above), the doorway functions as a symbolic boundary. Boundaries are necessarily tied up with identity, are essential to a collective sense of self, and make

interaction possible. Boundaries delimit where we begin and where we end, and the blurring of boundaries is associated with a lack of definition regarding identity.

This applies not to only the doorway, but also to the other boundaries demarcating the church from other social entities: namely, the walls. Again, it is their symbolic rather than their material significance as boundaries which is the more salient. Symanowski's rhetorical argument that a congregation would cease to be a congregation if it has walls within, around and outside it, is clearly an overstatement. In fact, it is the opposite of his statement which is the case. It does not make sense to speak of a congregation without having figurative walls, that is, without having symbolic boundaries. The issue is not whether or not they should exist, but rather how congregants interact with their inevitable symbolic boundaries, particularly in relation to people who are outside of these boundaries, whether it be the insiders who are socially partitioned from each other or their attitude towards the outsiders who do not belong to the congregation. This is a point which will be returned to directly.

In pushing such a rhetorical case for the removal of congregational boundaries, it overlooks the consequences of undermining the collective sense of self which is essential for a congregation to have an identity at all. Indeed, it almost becomes an argument for the dismantling of congregations. When scripture is quoted in support of an argument it can often be little more than a rhetorical device, as in Symanowski's use of Psalm 18.29: "By my God I can leap over a wall". Alternatively, the metaphor used in Proverbs 25.28 would arguably make a more relevant and substantive statement in the context of this discussion: "A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls" (RSV). That is, the proverb compares the condition of being without walls with the vulnerability to

destruction which results from the removal of certain boundaries. A congregation without walls (ie symbolic boundaries) is one which cannot sustain its identity.

On the other hand, Symanowski writes helpfully on the theme that social segmentation in a congregational culture must not be such that it divides people against each other, for there is a direct relationship between congregational culture and congregational mission (102):

If the congregation is to be in a condition that will allow it to respond to the questions of the world and to continue in dialogue with it in its dispersion, then it must be incessantly trained to do this when it is gathered. If Christians are to be catalyzers of brotherliness and community...then they must not only be called to do this but they must also practise it in their gathered life. The world ought to see that in your gatherings free men get along with one another in a new way, without fear and mistrust. They respect one another even when there are differences of opinion. They know no hierarchical ladder from which one can look down upon the others from the vantage point of the office rungs and title rungs which happen for the moment to be higher. In the gathered congregation we learn how to get along with one another in a manner worthy of human beings, seeing in every other person first the man, and not the superior or inferior, the competitor or the other point of view...we must be very clear that many things in our gatherings will have to be changed in order to accomplish this.

Again, this indeed has resonance with the ways in which the status economy and micro-politics of Riverstane culture run counter to congregational mission. Symanowski speaks of 'training' as a response to this. The proposal here is that it is a matter for Christian education, in what Thomas Groome calls shared Christian praxis, which in the context of mission would be the praxis of the congregation's relationships with outsiders. Groome defines this shared praxis as "a group of Christians sharing in dialogue their critical reflection on present action in light of the Christian Story and its Vision toward the end of lived faith" (1980: 184). The relevant guiding narratives in this connection might include, for example, the inappropriateness of a 'Promised Land' perspective (as in 1 Samuel 8), the

self-emptying of Christ and its implications for a concern with matters of status (Philippians 2), divisions in the church (1 Corinthians 1), love of neighbour (Luke 10), and hospitality to the stranger (Matthew 25).

The "present action" which would offer an appropriate starting point in such a church as Riverstane, then, is not so much the relationships between insider and insider, but rather between insider and outsider. For reasons that will become clear in the final chapter, this would be a first large step towards developing a missionary culture in such a congregation, a proximate goal of learning inclusivity towards the many outsiders who already come to the church door. The encounter with the stranger is an opportunity for transformation in the context of a congregation which has a culture of exclusion. In a paper which was presented to the 1996 conference on theology and anthropology held by the Society of the Study of Theology, Henk Woldring, drawing from Julia Kristeva's Stranger to Ourselves (1991), describes 'the mirror of the stranger' (14):

The stranger is for us, after all, a 'mirror' in which we can learn to see our own strangeness. In other words, the stranger plays the role of reminding us of our own strangeness. The stranger faces us with the fact that everything which we consider as familiar also has another side: namely that it could be different from what it is or that it can even be improved upon...We must learn to see the stranger as familiar and the familiar as 'strange'.

The theological basis for this as an approach to mission is reflected in the Old Testament injunctions to welcome the strangers within their gates (significantly, in terms of the threshold) as in Deuteronomy 24.14. This is not merely in keeping with the traditional rituals of the threshold in the Ancient Near East, but is also particularly on the grounds of God's deliverance of the Israelites, as in Deuteronomy 10.19 and Exodus 23.9. Woldring comments:

The alien is a 'mirror' in which the Israelites could see themselves reflected. The encounter with the alien ought to lead them to self-criticism. The memory of their own sojourn in a foreign land is conceived as an

active force in the offensive against prejudice and social barriers and for the renewal of the relation with strangers. That memory furnished the basis for a universal ethics.

However, Woldring does not adduce the even more forceful biblical material which is to be found in the New Testament. The concept of philoxenia as kindness or hospitality to strangers is explicit in Romans 12.13 and Hebrews 13.2, and its cognate is in 1 Timothy 3.2, Titus 1.8, 1 Peter 4.9. But the principle of philoxenia is more strongly evident in gospel material. The inclusion of Rahab in the genealogy of Jesus relates to the story of her protective hospitality for two strangers (Matthew 1.5, cf Hebrews 11.31, James 2.25, Joshua 6.22-23). In Matthew 10.40-42 those who are hospitable to strangers will be rewarded as though they were disciples of Christ. In Matthew 25.31-46 there is something of a sacrament of the stranger, in which the final judgement of humankind apparently rests on the question of welcoming and being hospitable to strangers. The parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10.29-37 is a story about hospitality to a stranger. And in Luke 24.13-35 it was when disciples offered hospitality to a stranger that they recognised the risen Christ. It would be difficult to overstate the force of these narratives.

In a profound book, Thomas Ogletree takes up this theme of hospitality to strangers. Although he does not explore or even refer to the New Testament concept of philoxenia, but rather uses the theme of hospitality to the stranger as an ethical metaphor, he comments (1985: 1, 2, 4):

To be moral is to be hospitable to the stranger...To offer hospitality to a stranger is to welcome something new, unfamiliar, and unknown into our life-world. On the one hand, hospitality requires a recognition of the stranger's vulnerability in an alien social world...On the other hand, hospitality designates occasions of potential discovery which can open up our narrow, provincial worlds...My readiness to welcome the other into my world must be balanced by my readiness to enter the world of the other. Hospitality to the stranger points towards an ongoing dialectic of host and

stranger. It expresses a fundamental recognition of the world's plurality...The promise borne by the reciprocal dialectic of host and stranger is the emergence of a new world of shared meanings.

Exactly what the content of philoxenia should be in such an approach to mission will depend on the setting of the congregation involved and the needs of the stranger. What might this involve in practice at Riverstane Church? Clearly in any congregation without a programme of Christian education in place, a vital step is to introduce, within cultural constraints and in ways that are accessible to all, the 'planned learning experience' as a normal component of church life. Again, in any congregation this depends upon pastoral leadership and initiative, and at Riverstane has implications for the intentionality of Sunday services, the form and content of proclamation, the provision of opportunities for meaningful participation in discourse and decision-making, and especially the re-skilling of individuals in all areas of church activity. Within such an ongoing and continually developing programme, shared praxis then starts to become a possibility when congregants can appropriate for themselves the content of philoxenia as it might be expressed in terms of their own culture. This is as much a matter of educational principle as practical expediency since, to be effective, ownership of the process must be theirs. That is, it has to be their shared praxis.

Following Groome (1991: 146-148), such planned learning experiences begin with naming/expressing present praxis. Apposite to this would, perhaps, be naming who the various strangers are, and expressing what happens to them as they cross the symbolic boundary at the church door. This would be followed by critical reflection on present action, in which congregants might perhaps consider who they are as a Christian community and what this means in relation to what happens to the stranger within their gates. The next movement is making Christian story/vision accessible, in

which the nature and promise of philoxenia as a constitutive part of Christian identity is disclosed through New Testament tradition, perhaps combined with some practical exercise of providing congregational hospitality on a specific occasion or of being the strangers in another setting. Then a dialectical hermeneutic between Christian story/vision and that of the congregants would take place, perhaps exploring the tensions between hospitality to the stranger and practical exigencies at Riverstane, by which some present realities there might be rendered explicit and called into question. Lastly, in decision and response, congregants themselves would articulate concrete strategies which lie within the realm of what is culturally possible at Riverstane, perhaps clarifying what hospitality might mean in such a setting and in relation to the needs of different types of stranger - from ordinary courtesies to spontaneous acts of generosity, from chance interactions to special arrangements for tourists. While in itself this would hardly be sufficient, it is nevertheless a necessary condition for congregational mission. As David Bosch notes, "The missionary dimension of a local church's life manifests itself, among other ways, when it is...able to welcome outsiders and make them feel at home" (1991: 373). Similarly, Craig Dykstra comments: "The stranger is...one who is worthy of being received, attended to, and served just because he or she is there" (1981: 119).

Conclusion

This chapter has reflected upon congregational culture at Riverstane Church and has suggested philoxenia as a Christian principle to guide congregational mission in such a setting. Following on from the relevance of boundaries in this discussion of congregational mission, the theme of boundaries will finally be taken up again in Chapter Nine, which considers boundaries in the pastoral context.

Boundaries in the Pastoral Context

Introduction

A central feature of the ethnography contained in Part Two of this thesis is the importance of symbolic boundaries in relation to congregational culture at Riverstane Church, and this was taken up in Chapter Eight with regard to mission. Now the role of boundaries is further considered in the pastoral context. As indicated in the previous chapter, Part Three of the thesis takes more of a divergent than convergent path in reflecting upon the ethnography of Part Two, so as to make statements of a broader nature beyond the particularity of Riverstane Church. Accordingly, Chapter Eight began with the cultural obstacles to congregational mission at Riverstane, and in light of these proposed in general terms the New Testament concept of philoxenia, or hospitality to strangers, as a guide and proximate beginning point for transformation.

As a corollary to the emphasis in this thesis upon the perspectives of ordinary congregants, pastoral discussion has been postponed to this final chapter. That is not to say previous chapters have lacked pastoral significance, but until now this has been left generally undeveloped. Similarly, reference to the actual minister of Riverstane Church in the course of the ethnography has been fairly incidental, as indeed it continues to be in this chapter. The minister has been appropriately visible in the account, but by definition is not the focus of this research which, again, is concerned primarily with congregational culture as experienced by ordinary church members.

In keeping with this, as discussed in previous chapters (on pages 163-165 and 176 above), any choice of research focus entails a proper and necessary selectivity in the ethnographic account, and just as Hermes never undertook to tell all, but promised not to mislead, so the focus here does not give particular prominence to the minister per se. Interestingly, Peter Stromberg's ethnography of the Stockholm congregation at Immanuelskyrkan (1986) is also not primarily concerned with the pastor, but rather focuses on how congregants relate differentially to the symbols of faith in the commitment system of the congregation. While in any study of congregational culture it is reasonable that there should be some reference to the minister, it is a matter of focus as to the form which that reference might take, whether it be in terms of figure or ground. As will be seen, in keeping with the place given to the insiders' perspective in the rationale for this work as a whole, the pastoral reflection does not have its frame of reference centred upon the pastor as figure and the congregation as ground, but, in an important sense, is focused more on the relative position of congregants themselves.

This chapter is arranged in two parts. The first part considers ways in which congregational culture at Riverstane Church frames the pastoral context. In particular, it is argued that Riverstane culture may be regarded in terms of a collective narcissism, and this has significance for the rationale behind the theme of philoxenia in relation to congregational mission, as described in the previous chapter. The cultural narcissism at Riverstane also has implications for the preferred style of pastoral leadership there, and this leads to a consideration of the pastoral use of power. The second part of the chapter then broadens the discussion into the area of personal boundaries in the pastoral context, and proposes a pastoral modality which is based on a boundaries perspective.

I. Congregational Culture and the Pastoral Context

James Poling (1991) highlights the distinction between the popular usage of the term 'narcissism' (as synonymous with inordinate self-love, self-absorption, or egocentrism), and the healthy narcissism which juxtaposes appropriate self-affirmation and self-critique. Distinct from both of these is dysfunctional narcissism, which Poling (drawing on Heinz Kohut) associates with the simultaneous presence of grandiosity and self-devaluation (106-107):

In deficient development, narcissism tends to split into grandiosity and self-devaluation. The function of narcissism is to regulate the self-esteem of the self by balancing the need for positive self-affirmation with the need for constructive self-critique. The deficient self often seriously overestimates or underestimates its ability to function in certain situations...The mirror image of self-devaluation is grandiosity, that is, the tendency of the self to overvalue its functioning and competence. This is just another aspect of the self damaged in its ability to make a realistic evaluation of its relation to others. Believing that one has the power or skills to handle an impossible situation results from development fixated on the grandiose self, which cannot fail.

Again on the theme of narcissistic grandiosity and self-devaluation, Poling comments (67, 69):

The grandiose self is the self who is never wrong...In this perceptual world, whenever two persons are interacting, one must be dominant and the other subordinate. If they find themselves in the subordinate position, they must be deferential to avoid harm or challenge very carefully. If they are in the dominant position, they feel they can do whatever they want.

The claim being made here is that aspects of congregational culture at Riverstane are consistent with these features, particularly in relation to the micro-politics as described in Chapters Seven and Eight. Grandiosity as the over-estimation of self, together with self-devaluation through subordinate relationships, is strongly reminiscent of the status economics at Riverstane with its sense of being special and important, together with the pressure to conform and the emphasis upon deference to authority.

A. Narcissistically Oriented Congregational Culture

If the coexistence of grandiosity and self-devaluation is characteristic of dysfunctional narcissism, then these have their counterparts in Riverstane culture in the cycles of difference and deference described in Chapter Eight (on page 287 above). The sense of being 'different' is not so much to do with an integrated identity as with a somewhat hubristic and superior outlook. According to Michael Lewis, hubris "in extreme cases...is associated with grandiosity or narcissism" (1992: 78). Donald Capps agrees with this (1995: 163):

Lewis is right to associate hubris with the narcissistic personality because it has a sense of self-importance and of entitlement that far exceeds actual achievements and accomplishments.

On the other hand, the emphasis upon deference at Riverstane is associated with routine de-skilling of individuals and acceptance of the publicly allocated nature of status in order to conform, leading to an experience of dissonance which is in turn suppressed. Likewise, Capps also highlights the link between narcissism, lack of feeling, and the conforming self (1995: 5):

As recent psychoanalytic theory holds, the narcissist is one who has replaced the true self with a false, conforming self, and the conforming self is noteworthy for its lack of feeling both toward others and also toward self.

A further comparison between narcissistic dysfunction and aspects of Riverstane culture at a collective level can be identified in connection with boundaries. Christopher Lasch comments (1985: 19, 184):

As the Greek legend reminds us, it is the confusion of the self and the not-self - not "egoism" - that distinguishes the plight of Narcissus. The minimal or narcissistic self is, above all, a self uncertain of its own outlines, longing either to remake the world in its own image or to merge into its environment in a blissful union...Narcissus drowns in his own reflection, never understanding that it is a reflection. He mistakes his own image for someone else and seeks to embrace it without regard to his safety. The point of the story is not that Narcissus falls in

love with himself, but, since he fails to recognise his own reflection, that he lacks any conception of the difference between himself and his surroundings.

At first sight this might appear to be puzzling since, as was noted in Chapter Five (on page 196 above), the boundaries between insiders and outsiders and in the social segmentation of the congregation are strengthened, rather than blurred, on account of the particularity of the setting. Yet Lasch speaks of "a self uncertain of its own outlines". However, it was also noted in Chapter Eight (on page 274 above) that paradoxically there is another sense in which the congregational boundaries are markedly permeable. This is seen for example in the public quality of the building as a civic temple, whereby outside organisations are regularly made the focus of Sunday morning services. But most especially, the blurring of boundaries at Riverstane relates to the degree to which the congregation as 'the city church' identifies itself not just with these prestigious organisations but to the values of prestige and status associated with such high society, rather than on the guiding narratives of the Christian faith. That is, the boundaries which are blurred at Riverstane are those which relate to the specifically Christian identity of the congregation.

It seems possible, then, to speak of something like a collective narcissism, that is, a narcissistically oriented congregational culture. This is different from the idea set out by Lasch of a 'culture of narcissism', in which the sociocultural milieu contributes to narcissism among its members. To describe congregational culture as being narcissistically oriented is not to say that congregants are narcissistic, but rather that there are features of the social processes at a collective level which correspond to characteristics of dysfunctional narcissism. Similarly, the idea of a neurotic organisation, as set out by Merry and Brown (1987), has nothing to do with neurotic individuals in an organisation.

The point of the above discussion on narcissistically oriented congregational culture at Riverstane is that it frames the pastoral context and so has implications for pastoral leadership and action. Importantly, it also relates to the discussion in the previous chapter where it was suggested, with regard to the characteristic lack of congregational mission, that a programmatic approach to philoxenia could provide a key to possible transformation. Now, in light of the foregoing remarks it becomes possible to justify more explicitly the emphasis upon hospitality to strangers. Specifically, a defining feature of narcissism is that the individual, whose sense of identity is underdeveloped (described by Lasch as "the minimal self"), fails to relate appropriately to the 'otherness' of the 'other'. Translated in terms of Riverstane culture, the congregation's sense of Christian identity has a corresponding need for development as it similarly fails to relate appropriately to other social entities and to the strangers within its gates. As the cycle of self-regarding behaviour which is characteristic of narcissism cannot be interrupted by means of further self-regarding behaviour, it was proposed on page 298 that the present action which needs to be addressed in the shared praxis of the congregation is not so much the relationships between insider and insider, but rather between insider and outsider. The potential salvation of Narcissus lay in turning aside from the reflection, rather than gazing the more intently into it.

In what sense, then, can philoxenia be seen as a proximate first step at Riverstane towards congregational mission? The rationale for this arises from the limits of what lies within the reach of a narcissistically oriented culture. In an important extract commenting on the potential for change in narcissistic personalities, Capps writes (1990: 246-7):

According to Heinz Kohut...it is doubtful that escape from the tyranny of narcissism can be effected by means of exhortations to abandon one's self-love in favor of object-love, such as we find in well-intentioned sermons that encourage parishioners to abandon self-

interest, self-preoccupations, and self-love, and begin to relate to others in selfless love. In Kohut's view, narcissists are constitutionally unable to make such a dramatic alteration in their life orientation. Instead, he recommends an intermediate step he calls the "transformation of narcissism," where certain modest and yet decisive modifications in the narcissistic personality are effected. These changes involve the acceptance of the necessary limits of one's existence; acceptance of the necessary frustrations of one's self-interest; and a new regard for others, not based on true object-love (which requires more than the narcissist can muster)...[R]eligious leaders should be assisting parishioners toward "transformed narcissism," and not be holding out for the almost impossible ideal of replacement of self-love with object-love.

The above insights would suggest that by analogy, in a narcissistically oriented congregational culture, a realistic strategy for transformation requires some intermediate step which recognises that a sudden and dramatic alteration in the life of the congregation is constitutionally unattainable. Given that mission is a function of the relationship between insiders and outsiders, philoxenia establishes a place for this relationship on the congregational agenda and in that sense could represent an intermediate step such as Capps suggests. More concretely, on pages 300-301 the process of how such hospitality to strangers might be developed at Riverstane was briefly sketched, although the details of what lies within the realm of the culturally possible is best determined by cultural insiders. But at the least it would mean considering the way in which strangers feel they are being treated, be it at the door, before the service, during the service, or after the service; how they might prefer to be treated or what their various needs might be; and how the congregants would themselves wish to be treated were the positions to be reversed. This might lead in turn to significant adjustments in the way things are done at Riverstane. Then, for all its inevitable social segmentation, the congregation would have begun to share praxis based on a collective sense of self which is inclusively other-regarding rather than exclusively self-regarding.

The transformative potential of hospitality to strangers lies in its possibilities for change in the agent. As discussed on page 298, the stranger is a 'mirror' by which we can see our own strangeness, that is, our own differentness to the 'other'. This is not like the reflecting surface into which Narcissus, transfixed, gazes passively in the failure to distinguish his own identity. Rather, it is an active encounter with others, out of which a proper sense of self can develop. Thomas Ogletree notes that "the promise borne by the reciprocal dialectic of host and stranger is the emergence of a new world of shared meanings" (1985: 4). Hospitality to the stranger is not only of benefit to the recipient; it also enriches the one who is hospitable.

B. Ministers as Megalopsuchoi

Congregational culture also frames the pastoral context with regard to the favoured style of leadership. The status economy at Riverstane is such that it is arguably predisposed towards a choice of minister which is consistent with its collective sense of self as a church that is special and important. That is, such a congregation could ordinarily be expected to call ministers who satisfy criteria of status which might be supplementary to professional abilities, experience, and qualifications in terms of parish ministry. Such criteria would relate to those cultural features to which status is attached in the congregation such as social rank, allegiance to royalty, the honours system, the military, the Conservative Party, the business community, and prominent institutions. Concomitant with this, such a choice of minister would also seem likely to reinforce the existing cultural systems (described on page 287 above) through his attachment to the values of tradition, status, and authority, which would in turn tend to perpetuate the status quo in a stable equilibrium.

Riverstane is not a church from which ministers leave to take up other congregational appointments, but rather is widely seen to be a position which is at the height of the profession, and where incumbents remain in post until the time of retirement, typically after a long tenure. Accordingly, they are regarded as leading churchmen (and always church-men). Past ministers have become moderators of the general assembly of the Church of Scotland, and members of the congregation have come to associate their church with being a place where such ministers are found. Indeed, whatever the distinctive aptitudes which Riverstane ministers have brought to the post as individuals, a propensity for statesmanship tends to be one of them. This is consistent with the premise at Riverstane which entails a strongly civic character to the minister's duties.

Perhaps the most germane archetype of statesmanship as it appears at Riverstane is expressed in Aristotle's portrait of the megalopsuchos, the great-souled man, which appears in Nicomachean Ethics (IV: 1123a35 to 1125a35). William Barclay summarises it as follows (1987: 61-62):

The great-souled man is the man who claims much and who deserves much...When persons of worth offer the great-souled man honour, he will deign to accept it...He will not rejoice overmuch at prosperity, and he will not grieve overmuch at adversity. He will be largely indifferent even to honour, for nothing really matters to him. This is why great-souled people usually give the impression of being haughty...The great-souled man is fond of conferring benefits, but he dislikes receiving them, for to confer is the mark of superiority...He will never, or at least only with the greatest reluctance, ask for help. To those above him he will be haughty; to those beneath him he will be condescendingly gracious...He will give the impression of being idle and slow to act, for he will be interested in nothing less than great enterprises...He will have a slow walk, a deep voice, and a deliberate way of speaking.

While the humour of Aristotle's depiction of the great-souled man can be seen in his use of exaggeration, its significance here is that, without referring to the relative degree to which any individual minister at Riverstane has

approximated to these characteristics, it represents a recognisable model to which some types of statesman might to a greater or lesser extent be compared, even if it may not in its every detail describe actual persons.

Although clearly it is not the only form of statesmanship, Gavin Ardley (1988: 108) comments that "all higher worldly vocations culminate in the class of the megalopsuchos". At Riverstone Church, it can be argued that from minister to minister this model represents a style of leadership which congregants over generations seem to have preferred. As informant R comments: "[The previous minister] had the same lordly way as [the present minister]" (R.2.a.iii.). While Ardley's article has the title 'Can the Megalopsuchos be Saved?', the question here is 'Should the untransformed megalopsuchos be a minister?' In the classic depiction outlined above, the outward expression of this inward disposition is characterised by a typically grandiose bearing (as distinct from grandeur in the material sense). It is important to emphasise here that, at an aretaic level, there is nothing inconsistent about statesmanship on this model. On the other hand, in the context of Christian ministry, William Barclay highlights the tension between megalopsuchia as an archetype and Christian ideals (1987: 62):

The Greek great man was the man who stood above and looked down. In the Christian ethic the great man is the man who looks up to God, who knows nothing so much as his own need, and who sits where his fellow men sit.

This tension arises from differences between Greek and Christian ideals of greatness. It consists in the conflict between grandiosity and humility, and goes to the heart of the theologically problematic nature of the status economy at Riverstone Church, as discussed in the previous chapter (on page 284 above). Ardley acknowledges this tension between grandiosity and humility, but allows for "grandeur in the world" to be "tempered in the inner heart by lowliness before God" (1988: 109). In doing so he quotes

Sirach 10.22: "The rich, and the eminent, and the poor - their glory is the fear of the Lord" (RSV). However, Ardley is substituting the dispositional, ethical category (greatness of soul) with one relating to material circumstances (grandeur in the world), and perhaps this is because the citation from Ben Sirach refers not to megalopsuchia as an aretaic mode of being, but rather to wealth, eminence, and poverty as external contingencies.

But even allowing the category substitution introduced by Ardley, referring to the situation in which grandeur in the world is tempered by inner lowliness before God, it would still seem something of a contradiction for someone who is engaged in Christian ministry to be outwardly exhibiting grandeur. As James Poling puts it, Jesus formed a community that was inclusive and just, "encouraging the prophetic tradition of favouring 'the least of these' (Matthew 25.40, 45)", and calling "the leaders of the church to be the servants of all (Luke 22.26)" (1991: 152). Given that congregational culture at Riverstane frames the pastoral context in such a way that the preferred style of leadership approximates to the archetype of megalopsuchia, then this would seem to be in tension with Christian ideals.

C. Power in the Pastoral Context

Discussion of megalopsuchia is bound up with discussion of power and leadership, because the great-souled man is identified with both. At Riverstane, in particular, the pastoral use of power as a feature of congregational culture was seen in the kirk session meeting documented in Chapter Seven (on page 240 above).

The connotations attached to the word 'power' can be positive or negative depending on the circumstances. Similarly in the pastoral context, power can be either

straightforward or problematic subject to what takes place in specific situations, but it nevertheless remains that the use of power is properly intrinsic to the nature of pastoral roles. On this note, Roy Oswald highlights the appropriate use of power in terms of being effective in leadership and action, rather than it being something which is purely synonymous with coercion or manipulation: "There is no particular virtue in being impotent or ineffective. In order to be effective we need to be powerful" (1981: 2).

1. Sources of Power at Riverstane

Power is understood here as the ability to act, together with the ability either to cause others to act or to constrain their actions. The different sources of power identified by Oswald (1981: 4-5) fall into the two main categories of the personal realm and the corporate realm. Personal sources of power include charisma (attractive self-affirmation), expertise, projection (influencing the way others perceive the self), position (making use of the opportunities available to us), instruments (material objects including technology), setting firm boundaries, overstepping the boundaries of others, and attacking others. Corporate sources of power include reputation, coalition (membership of groups), information, and officially recognised role (as distinct from personal position).

Each of these sources of power are present at Riverstane. Some are no different there than they would be anywhere else, such as personal charisma and the power of reputation, but others are more closely identified with characteristics of congregational culture. For example, social reward and punishment with regard to the public allocation of status is in the power of those whose position in the congregation is sufficiently prominent (described on page 254 above). Also, boundaries have been discussed as a common arena of conflict (page 258 above). Instrumental power lies, for example, in

the elders' uniform of black tailcoat and striped trousers, to the extent that it is a reason for not having women elders (page 230 above). Coalition power is evident in the clusters of people who tend to associate with each other in the nave section of the church before and after the Sunday morning service, also reflecting the composition of social circles outwith Sunday gatherings (page 268 above). Further, control of access to information has been described as a feature in the decision-making process and status games of the congregation (pages 251 and 259 above). Lastly, in a culture which values deference, official authority is also a source of power at Riverstane (page 271 above).

2. Authority, Autonomy, and Pastoral Power

With regard to the power of the minister, clearly personal sources of power will be a function of the personality variables of the individual, and so are of no particular interest here except perhaps as they might relate in abstraction to the megalopsuchos model. Accordingly, attention will be focused on corporate sources of power as they relate to the office of the minister.

In Riverstane culture, the primary source of pastoral power is located in the formal authority which accompanies the role of minister (which Oswald refers to as 'structural power'). Known otherwise as 'legitimate power', it does not strictly belong to the minister but is vested in him by the congregation. Ellen Stortz describes authority as "externally recognised, publicly validated, and often institutionally conferred" (1993: 32). Richard Sennett (1980: 22) uses a formulation which he associates with Max Weber, which is authority as "belief in legitimacy, measured by voluntary compliance." As a result, the limits of this institutional power are defined by what the community in question will allow. Accordingly, at Riverstane, although congregants might privately complain about things,

ultimately they give their assent to the status quo and this is partly because of the cultural emphasis on deference to status and authority (page 271 above). However, the limits of what a community will permit are also open to redefinition by the leader through the use of personal power (for example as charisma, or reward and punishment). Further, the leader can extend structural power through the creation of new structure in the organisation, for example in the creation of new committees (pages 229 and 238 above).

The result at Riverstane is a situation where, over generations, ministers approximating to a greater or lesser extent to the megalopsuchos, and so possessing considerable personal power, encounter a congregational culture which bestows them with much structural power and in turn defers to it unfalteringly. But even leaving aside the discussion on the suitability of the megalopsuchos as an archetypal model for statesmanship in the ministry, the question still arises as to how that authority could function in such a situation. The classic depiction of the great-souled man summarised earlier describes a virtually self-sufficient person who maintains a posture of superiority in relation to those who are beneath him. The picture is one of autonomy.

In a chapter with the title, 'Autonomy, an Authority Without Love', Richard Sennett discusses this mode of power which he associates with occupations of high professional prestige (1980: 87). He cites a case study from management research in which an employee informs his superior that he has been offered another post, in the hope of perhaps securing a better offer from his present employer. The superior declares that he knew about it already, and effectively declines to enter into the discussion which the employee is seeking. Instead of engaging with the content of what is said, the superior makes short and impersonal replies in the form of what Sennett calls "reversed responses" (101). When the employee becomes increasingly frustrated, the superior

maintains a detached indifference and repeats himself that the employee will have to make up his mind where he wants to work. Finally the employee loses his temper while the other remains calm.

Sennett notes that the superior is not just in control of the dialogue but also controls the psychological reality experienced by the employee. The superior achieves this through his stance as someone who has not just a greater, but a total perspective on the situation (100). As a result, his power to define reality for the employee has "a cowing and subduing effect." The burden of the conversation then falls upon the employee to justify himself, while his statements are discredited of having any intrinsic meaning. It is a matter of establishing dominance through indifference (103):

The employer has revealed nothing of himself: he does not respond to influences; he exerts them. This imbalance is his autonomy.

The effect is to bind the two unequally:

[The employee] is emotionally in the employer's grip. He is bidding for recognition; he wants to shake his superior out of indifference, to be seen as a person by his employer. This play between recognition and indifference is how the knot tightens.

It is important to note, however, that the superior is not acting out of a sense of malice, or taking pleasure in upsetting the other person. Rather, he is "playing according to a set of rules...about how to deal with threats from below" (104). The point is not that the autonomous person is a bad person or an inhuman person. Rather, it is that in the relationship of authority the autonomous individual has no particular imperative of encouragement, nurture, concern, or generativity with respect to those who are beneath him. There is nothing necessarily unethical or untoward about this. But it is an authority without love, and this becomes problematic in the pastoral context.

Clearly the superior has 'power over' the employee, a form of power which Stortz (1993: 41-42) describes as coercive, or dominative power, and which is to be distinguished from 'power with' (coactive power, or friendship), and 'power within' (charismatic power). However, 'power over' is not to be equated with autonomous power and, as Stortz explains, it is not necessarily inappropriate in the pastoral context, although perhaps a better term would be 'power above'. While maleficent coercive power can be linked with oppression or abuse, Stortz is careful to emphasise that nevertheless there are legitimate forms of 'power over' (53-56). In particular, aspects of pastoral counselling are ultimately grounded in 'power over'. While a component of 'power with' will always be relevant to counselling situations, even the act of 'empowering' other people presupposes a relationship of 'power over'. Although criticism is sometimes made against the idea of the pastor as 'enabler' because it posits the idea of a power differential, the point being made here is that it could hardly be otherwise. In pastoral situations there can be an appropriate use of 'power above' without resorting to the autonomous exercise of authority, on the one hand, or authoritarianism on the other.

Appropriate 'power above' can be seen in each of the metaphors of pastoral counselling as identified by Lyall (1995: 95-107). For example, in proclamation (97), "the counselling relationship provides the freedom in which clients can make their own interpretations" (emphasis added). By implication it is the counsellor who provides the opportunity for that freedom, and so requires a power which is in some respect above that of the client. Yet 'power above' does not preclude mutuality, even though a power differential is present. Similarly with the other metaphors: in healing, the helper has the power of effective intervention; in story-telling, the narrator is "the bearer of stories - and a Story", and has the power to provide

access to these; and in companionship, the counsellor has the power to share in the client's journey through the disclosure of personal experience which the client would not otherwise hear.

Not only in counselling situations, but in the pastoral context as a whole, the idea of responsible 'power above' is suggested by the pastoral modality of shepherding, which Donald Capps (drawing on Seward Hiltner, Alastair Campbell, and H Richard Niebuhr) associates with the self-metaphor of 'the responsible self' (1984: 104):

The pastoral image of the shepherd is a working out of the pastoral implications of the responsible self. Like responsible selves, shepherds attend to the needs of those for whom they assume responsibility. But also like responsible selves, shepherds recognise that they cannot force the others to accept their guidance, so they seek to make it attractive as well as authoritative...When we link the pastoral image of the shepherd to the responsible self, we recognize that a dominant theme of the shepherd model is responsibility. The shepherd assumes responsibility for the sheep (they "hear his voice"), but not to the extent that they are no longer responsible for themselves.

Indeed, the conjoining of power with self-responsibility is necessary not just in ministry but in all relationships of 'power above'.

Other specific examples mentioned by Stortz in which there are appropriate forms of 'power over' include the instructor-learner, parent-child, and doctor-patient relationships. Whatever the context, there are three modes in which 'power over' operates, and these can operate simultaneously (56-64). A sovereign relationship is associated with situations where there is a superordinate leader and a subordinate group. A parental relationship is associated with situations of unequal status, position, authority, or experience. A bureaucratic relationship is associated with situations of impersonal, static, and sometimes anonymous control. Again, Stortz explains that there is nothing necessarily problematic about this (64):

Lest we dismiss impersonal leadership entirely and applaud only what is personal, it is important to acknowledge that impersonal authority also has its place. It enables a pastor to minister to someone whom she really does not like; it enables a parishioner to receive ministry from a pastor whom he does not really admire.

So far, the pastoral reflection of this chapter has abstracted from micro-political features of congregational culture as described in the ethnographic account of Part Two. The second part of the chapter will now draw Part Three of the thesis to a conclusion by considering in broader terms what might be suggested by the ethnography to form, inform, and transform pastoral intentionality.

II. Boundary and Pastoral Modality

Central to this research has been the concept of symbolic boundaries for understanding congregational culture at Riverstone Church. From the boundary of the walls demarcating the church building from the rest of the community, the boundary of the door demarcating insider from outsider, the boundaries of groups demarcating insider from insider, to the personal boundaries of individuals in relation to the social processes which form the micro-political status economy of the congregation, a common theme throughout has been the matter of crossing these various boundaries.

At each level, the boundaries are tied in with the question of identity: the identity of Riverstone as a church which is special and important, the identity of those who belong and those who do not, the identity of those who are in the same social circle, the identity of those who have either more or less status as publicly allocated in the congregation. This relation between boundary and identity is encapsulated in the ontological formula, cognatus ergo sum: "I belong,

therefore I am" (Augsburger, 1986: 79). But particularly, boundaries and the boundary experiences of individuals are the essence of pastoral situations, and that is the theme of this final part of the chapter.

A. Salvation and Transfer Terminology

Throughout the Bible as a whole, the images of salvation are varied and express different aspects of what it means to be saved, depending on the nature of the corresponding plight which makes it necessary. Within the New Testament the soteriological language in the gospels, for example, plays on the twin meaning of sōzō to depict salvation as healing. But in Luke 1.46-55, alternatively, salvation is presented in terms of radical inversions (as in humbling the mighty and exalting the lowly). Moreover, in the Pauline corpus there is an interweaving and interacting mixture of metaphors. In this connection, Christiaan Beker warns against thinking that Paul "carefully separates the various symbolisms, as if each has a logical consistency of its own" (1980: 259). He adds that an emphasis on one set of soteriological terms over another is unsupportable (260):

His interpretation of the gospel cannot be hierarchically structured, as if there is one primary metaphor that dominates all the others...We are dealing with a paradigmatic structure and with a hermeneutical field, not with rigidly defined dogmatic units that must fit a hierarchically arranged architectonic system.

Beker (259) also refers to Paul's

hermeneutical versatility, which renders the heart of the gospel in such a way that it speaks to the needs and demands of the socio-cultural situations of his churches.

Accordingly, this section will focus not on any particular image of salvation, but, following the Pauline example of hermeneutical versatility, it pays attention to a structural feature of soteriological language which is common to

different images. The rationale for doing so is that this structural feature of soteriology relates directly to a central feature which arose from the ethnography at Riverstone Church and which proved to be of key importance for interpreting congregational culture: namely, boundaries as people experience them.

The structural feature of soteriology in question is concerned with 'transfer terminology'. This depicts salvation as the transfer from a situation of plight to a situation of no longer being in that plight. Gerd Theissen's analysis of Pauline transfer imagery (discussed by Beker, 256-260) summarises it under the symbolism of liberation, justification, reconciliation, transformation, death and life, and unification. Edward Sanders' analysis (1977: 463-472) is broadly similar except that he uses 'freedom' for 'liberation', and includes identification with the death and life of Christ alongside unification with Christ under 'participation in the death of Christ'.

Transfer terminology also relates to the pastoral goal of helping people to make the transition from a situation of 'before' to a situation of 'after', whatever nature the plight might have in that situation. It might be the plight of what David Tracy (1988: 105) refers to as a "limit-situation", and which he compares with Karl Jaspers' conception of "boundary-situations":

Such experiences (sickness, guilt, anxiety, recognition of death as one's own destiny) allow and, when intense, seem to demand reflection upon the existential boundaries of our present everyday experience. When an announcement of a serious illness - whether our own or of someone we love - is made, we begin to experience the everyday, the "real" world, as suddenly unreal: petty, strange, foreign to the now real world. That "limit" world of final closure to our lives now faces us with a starkness we cannot shirk and manages to disclose to us our basic existential faith or unfaith in life's very meaningfulness.

In such boundary-situations there is a pastoral continuity with the transfer associated with salvation, except that ultimately it is the action of God which is salvific. But even in pastoral situations which are not defined by plight or boundary-situations in the sense referred to above, for example in relation to significant life-events, or in fostering development in faith, gifts, or personal growth, there is still a 'before' and an 'after' between which it is hoped that transfer might be effected or contributed to by pastoral involvement.

B. Reframing the Threshold

The metaphor of transfer is concerned with crossing over, that is, making the transit across a line, symbolic or otherwise, delimiting the edge, or boundary, between two regions of belonging. Passage across a threshold as a metaphor is strongly associated with Arnold van Gennep, who has been described as the creator of French ethnography (Belmont, 1979). His concept of 'rites of passage' is an understanding of ceremonies, rituals, and customs which posits stages of separation, transition, and incorporation (van Gennep, 1960: 11). Drawing on this, anthropologist Victor Turner in his study of therapeutic rituals identifies phases of separation, liminality (or transition), and reincorporation when entering into new ways of being and becoming (1969: 94-95). Similarly, Ian Ainsworth-Smith and Peter Speck draw on them both in referring to pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal stages in making the significant or difficult "transition from one social group to another" (1982: 61). Rites of passage might be associated with transitions such as birth (with the corresponding Christian rite of baptism), joining the church, marriage, bereavement, but also might extend to non-religious events such as coming of age or engagement, and various others.

These descriptions bring out the force of the metaphor which is in terms of passage through a doorway. The image is of a person moving forwards in the context of a fixed doorframe. However, this is not the only way of looking at the situation. It assumes a stationary perspective outside of the person making the transition, and takes the doorway as the frame of reference. But from the frame of reference or phenomenology of the person involved in the situation, the doorway is not actually stationary. In fact from the perspective of the person in the situation it is the threshold which appears to be moving, and not the individual concerned.

This represents a reframing of the situation. Donald Capps writes that "the meaning any event has for us depends upon the frame in which we perceive it. When we change the frame, we change the meaning" (1990: 10). As a result, he goes on to argue, this can then be used as a therapeutic method in pastoral care. By reframing the idea of passage across the threshold, the centre is placed on the perspective of the person involved. The individual does not quite experience transition in terms of pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal stages, except perhaps retrospectively. The person at the centre experiences an inbreaking tide of events which cross over the personal boundary, or horizon, even though from another perspective it is the person who is crossing an external boundary. Indeed the van Gennep framing appears to foreground the boundary of the threshold against the personal boundary of the individual.

The experience of events crossing the personal horizon is partly what Charles Gerkin means by the "hermeneutics of the self" (1984: 97). In the sequence of day-to-day life, which Gerkin refers to as "life cycle time" (105), it is the individual who is normally considered to be moving through time. However, what the self actually experiences is the

passage of time. It is the experience of time which is moving, like an inbreaking tide upon the self: "Life cycle time...flows towards the present out of the future" (105). Again, in the van Gennep framing it is the individual who is seen to be going through stages. But as we experience it, the stages happen to us. A growing child does not strictly go through puberty, but rather puberty goes through the child. In the same way, we do not really go through bereavement, but more accurately become bereaved. Reframing the threshold metaphor in pastoral situations, so that the centre is not on external boundaries (which can be constructs that are imposed on the situation) but instead upon personal boundaries, is a matter of beginning where the individual actually is, and so beginning with reality as the person experiences it. Then any subsequent therapeutic reframing which may follow is more likely to be appropriate and effective. It is not that external boundaries (such as the boundaries of others in the interpersonal world) are to be disregarded in an exclusive focus upon the individual, but rather that the personal boundary should not be discounted.

This suggestion for reframing in terms of boundaries is far from novel. For example the Bible itself contains images which are framed in terms of the personal boundaries being crossed, such as in Proverbs 25.28: "A man without control of the spirit within him is like a city broken into and left without walls" (GNB). The image is of a city being invaded from the outside and subsequently destroyed from the inside, leaving it without a boundary. That is, it no longer has solid definition with regard to the world outside, and the picture is one of devastation and destruction. The metaphor compares the city wall with the personal boundary, and invites the question of what personal boundaries might be vulnerable to that could have similarly destructive consequences within the individual. Again, the parable of the unclean spirit in Matthew 12.43-45 compares the

individual with a house, which is also vulnerable to invasion, and this also has the consequence of destruction from within: "they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first" (v.45, RSV).

There is much more to both of these images. For example, the proverb has ethical implications regarding self-control, but in terms of plight and of intervention it clearly centres the frame of reference upon the personal boundary of the individual. The parable, in addition, has something metaphorical to say concerning the spiritual wellbeing of the individual in terms of the house being empty and so leaving the door open to the "seven other spirits more evil" than the unclean spirit (v.45). But there too the diagnosis of the situation is centred upon the personal boundary as a limit which, to the plight of the individual, has been invasively crossed.

Both passages make reference to spirits, and given that the imagery of unclean spirits is also a biblical mode of speaking about illness, the modern counterpart of this is in the image of the attacking virus. Albert Camus makes powerful use of it in The Plague (1994: 231-232):

The night began with a struggle, and Rieux knew that this grim struggle with the angel of plague was to last until dawn...Indeed, the only way in which he might help was to provide opportunities for the beneficence of chance, which too often stays dormant unless roused to action. Luck was an ally he could not dispense with. For Rieux was confronted by an aspect of the plague that baffled him. Yet again it was doing all it could to confound the tactics used against it; it launched attacks in unexpected places and retreated from those where it seemed definitely lodged. Once more it was out to darken counsel.

Although Susan Sontag (1989) resists the association between acquired immunodeficiency syndrome and the idea of plague, it can still be said that the human immunodeficiency virus powerfully symbolises the invasive crossing of boundaries at many levels: the unseen entry of the virus into the bloodstream by needle puncture (whether through transfusion

or infected syringe), break in the skin, intake of infected bodily fluid; then, once inside, the ability of the virus to cross cell membranes; and finally, once activated within the cell, the effect of the virus in turn to disable bodily defences against all other types of infection.

A boundaries approach in the pastoral context, then, would involve reframing pastoral situations in terms of events which cross the personal boundary - be it disease, loss, crisis, or indeed opportunity, challenge, blessing - and centres on the perspective of the person concerned.

C. The Interpathic Self

It follows from the above that attention to the frame of reference of the person involved in the pastoral situation requires the pastor to be willing temporarily to shift perspective to that of the individual concerned and yet without abandoning the pastor's own frame of reference, since that would amount to self-alienation. As previously quoted in Chapter One (on page 51 above), Hans-Georg Gadamer explains (1991: 305):

We must always already have a horizon in order to be able to transpose ourselves into a situation. For what do we mean by "transposing ourselves"? Certainly not just disregarding ourselves. This is necessary, of course, insofar as we must imagine the other situation. But into this other situation we must bring, precisely, ourselves. Only this is the full meaning of "transposing ourselves." If we put ourselves in someone else's shoes, for example, then we will understand him - ie, become aware of the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other person - by putting ourselves in his position.

In a similar vein, Paul Ricoeur notes (1969: 126):

The demand of justice thus consists in principle of a decentering of perspective by which the perspective of the other - the need, the claim, of the other - balances my perspective.

This de-centring of perspective requires a great deal of the pastor not only because it is demanding, but also because it

goes beyond the normal claims that one person can reasonably make upon another person in the routine 'I-Thou' encounters of ordinary interaction. This is partly why Richard Sennett's description of the exchange between the employer and employee, cited earlier (on page 315 above), is so revealing. There the autonomous superior was not willing, and would probably judge it inappropriate in that situation, to give any credence whatever to the perspective of the employee. After all, it was not a therapeutic context, and the superior would be forfeiting some of his legitimate power by doing so. There was no imperative in that situation, such as on the basis of agapē, for the superior to act any other way than he did, and that is why autonomy is described as "an authority without love".

Beyond questions of willingness and how appropriate or inappropriate the context may be, there is also the question, in terms of personal development, of how capable people are of temporarily de-centring their perspectives. Don Browning (1991: 187) refers to "the logic of equal regard" which is characterised by reversible thinking and universalisability, and these are features associated with only the final cognitive level identified by Lawrence Kohlberg in his theory of moral development. In Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, it is only in the penultimate stage that people have at least the potential to form the generativity required which he associates with care as a virtue, and which Donald Capps (1987: 132) further connects with the spiritual capacity for empathy. On this point, Charles Gerkin comments (1984: 43-44):

If one is to hear truly what the other person has to say in its own integrity, there must be a breaking through of the barrier that stands between the language world of the hearer and that of the speaker... Theologically speaking we encounter here the primordial sense of incarnation...Traditionally in pastoral counselling theory this process has been spoken about in the language of empathy, rapport, and acceptance. To empathize with another is to put oneself in the

other's place, to experience the actuality of life as the other experiences it. Anyone who has attempted to relate to another, particularly another who is troubled about his or her life experience, knows how difficult that is to do...The question must indeed be asked whether it is possible for us in the fullest sense to abandon our own perceptual and interpretive world in order to empathize with, become one with, the world of another.

Empathy, which Capps places in opposition with indifference, would at first sight seem to be necessary for a boundaries approach in the pastoral context. Capps writes (1987: 133):

I suggest that the spirit of empathy is the element of active faith that sustains the virtue of care. Care is not just a matter of being sympathetic, of feeling pity for those less fortunate than ourselves. Rather, care is energized by the spirit of empathy that enables us to see ourselves in the situation of the other and to recognise that the other's plight is an offence against ourselves.

The emphasis upon empathy is also a central feature of Carl Rogers' approach to client or person-centred therapy. Together with genuineness (or realness or congruence) and unconditional positive regard, there is the feature of accurate empathic understanding (Rogers, 1990: 136):

This means that the therapist senses accurately the feelings and personal meanings that the client is experiencing...When functioning best, the therapist is so much inside the private world of the other that he or she can clarify not only the meanings of which the client is aware but even those just below the level of awareness.

The difficulty with this is that it involves feeling with the other, and in the pastoral as opposed to the psychotherapeutic context there is a limited extent to which this can be called upon, depending on the resources of the pastor and the degree of correspondence between the life experiences of the pastor and that of the other person.

However, while sympathy views the experience of the other from a relatively detached position, empathy is not the only pastoral alternative to this. David Augsburger describes the care which is neither sympathy nor empathy, but which is interpathy (1986: 14):

Interpathy enables one to enter a second culture cognitively and affectively, to perceive and conceptualize the internal coherence that links the elements of the culture into a dynamic interrelatedness, and to respect that culture (with its strengths and weaknesses) as equally valid as one's own. This interpathic respect, understanding and appreciation makes possible the transcendence, for a moment in a particular case, of cultural limitations.

Although used here with reference to culture as a collective identity, interpathy applies equally to the boundaries of personal identity, that is, the horizon of the other person. Further, as Gadamer points out, the fusion of horizons has nothing to do with empathy (1991: 305): "Transposing ourselves consists neither in the empathy of one individual for another nor in subordinating another person". The point is that in contrast with sympathy, interpathy centres on the perspective of the other, but without being dependent upon an empathic understanding. That is, in situations where for any reason the pastor is not in a position to relate to the experience of the other, it is nevertheless still possible to centre on the perspective of that person.

It was noted earlier that, in Richard Sennett's terms, autonomy is an authority without love, and the point about interpathy is that the dynamic behind it is compassion. If "self-limiting behavior" may be understood as unwillingness to engage in the fusion of horizons of understanding, then Andrew Purves relates compassion with the life of Jesus and the de-centring of perspective (1989: 49-50):

Time and again Jesus broke the canons of self-limiting behavior...Once and for all we can see that compassion is not a feeling of sympathy or, even less so, of pity...There is no guarantee that compassionate service will ever be fashionable or that it will help one in one's career; it seems reasonable to suggest, in fact, that compassion may cause one also to be cast out, to become marginalized oneself.

Thomas Ogletree, in his important discussion on the moral imperative of de-centring based on agapeic neighbour-love, comments (1985: 44, 49):

In this frame of reference it is Christ who decenters me from my egoistic orientation to life, and in the

process makes room in my life for my fellow human beings...To read and interpret others solely in terms of our own worlds of meaning is to do them violence, to objectify them, to reduce them to sameness with everything else...[and] inclines us to assimilate the other to the self's own life project. In the process we obscure the decentering of perspective effected by the call or appeal of the other.

Further, Anthony Thiselton, in the context of the hermeneutical emphasis upon "listening, patience, and respect for 'the other'", also refers to the dynamic of compassion in this connection (1992: 560):

It remains a principle of pastoral theology and indeed of Christian love that one should try to put oneself into someone else's place, whether one seeks simply to understand, or to "do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matt.7.12).

Interpathy, then, in the pastoral context, contrasts both with sympathy and empathy, and is geared toward the fusion of horizons of understanding between the pastor and the individual concerned. The sympathetic person projects feelings onto the other on the basis of having had similar experiences, although this is of minimal pastoral help. The sympathetic person says, "I'm sorry for how I imagine it must be for you." Alternatively, the empathic person shares the other's feelings through shared experience, but ultimately the possibilities for this are limited (Gerkin, 1984: 45). The empathic person says, "I know just how it must be for you." However, in contrast to these, according to Augsburg (1986: 32), the interpathic person

enters another world of human energies and risks, making the self available to entertain what was formerly alien, to be hospitable to what is utterly new.

The interpathic person asks, "Help me to understand how it must be for you." Where sympathy is of limited help, and empathy is a limited resource, interpathy is the willingness to be introduced to what is foreign to the pastor's experience. The proposal here is that a more realistic pastoral modality for centring the frame of reference upon the personal boundary or horizon of the other person is one

that is predicated upon the quality of interpathy, rather than on empathy or sympathy. The corresponding pastoral self-metaphor for this modality would then be 'the interpathic self'.

Conclusion

The above quotation from Augsburgers with its reference to being "hospitable" is significant for the unity of this chapter and Part Three of the thesis as a whole, as it recalls the theme of philoxenia in the previous chapter with regard to congregational mission. In this chapter it was seen that the rationale behind the proposal of hospitality to strangers as a proximate but attainable goal relates to the narcissistically oriented nature of congregational culture, which also gives rise to a preference at Riverstane for choosing ministers from generation to generation who tend to approximate, to a greater or lesser degree, to the archetypal model of statesmanship in Aristotle's portrait of the megalopsuchos. In the discussion of this as a style of statesmanship in ministry, the theme of pastoral power arose with reference to autonomy as a form of authority.

In view of the unconcern and indifference associated with autonomous authority, a consideration of the individual's frame of reference in the pastoral context led to the proposal of a pastoral modality that gives attention to the boundary of the person concerned through a de-centring of the pastor's perspective. Finally it was suggested that this requires the quality of interpathy, with the corresponding pastoral self-metaphor of 'the interpathic self', which completes the thematic unity of Part Three of the thesis in terms of narcissistically oriented congregational culture, the limits of empathy, philoxenia as an intermediate goal, and boundaries in relation to mission and the pastoral context.

General Conclusion

Part Three of the thesis ended by noting the thematic unity between philoxenia in Chapter Eight and interpathy in Chapter Nine. Beyond this, it is now possible to consider a wider unity in relation to the thesis as a whole.

Hospitality to the stranger and pastoral de-centring are both essentially concerned with the perspective of the alien, the foreign, the other, although not by dissolving boundaries, but rather as a feature of Christian identity. The fantasy of a world without boundaries, of blissful union with the environment is, as Christopher Lasch explains, a narcissistic condition (1985: 19), perhaps adding a further possible nuance to a reading of the Proverb quoted in Chapters Eight and Nine (on pages 296 and 324): "A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls" (25.28, RSV). A man without self-control is like a man without proper boundaries, a narcissistic person, who does not know his limits, where he begins or where he ends.

Selfhood, says Lasch, is by contrast defined in terms of separation from the environment (166-167):

The womb gave us an unforgettable experience of absolute oneness with the world - the basis of all our intimations of immortality and of the infinite...At the same time, it gave us a taste of complete self-sufficiency and omnipotence. Our original relation to the universe was both solipsistic and symbiotic. Self-contained and therefore independent of the need for any external source of care and nourishment, we nevertheless flowed indistinguishably into our surroundings. Birth puts an end to the experience of narcissistic self-sufficiency and union with the world...As the infant learns to distinguish itself from its surroundings...the illusion of omnipotence...gives way.

The idea, then, of attention to the perspective of the alien, or the stranger, or the foreign, is not to be

confused with the narcissistic illusion of being coterminous with the environment. Rather, attention to the perspective of the other is a dynamic of hermeneutics. Anthony Thiselton (1992: 558) notes that Schleiermacher referred to the hermeneutical quality of "creative immediacy of understanding", which is equivalent to the emphasis placed "by Dilthey on imaginative empathy and rapport, and by Betti on openness, listening, patience, and respect for 'the other'." Thiselton describes these as hermeneutical emphases relating "to pastoral sensitivity towards persons."

Ethnography, philoxenia, and interpathy are all based on a hermeneutical de-centring in order to give attention to the horizon, or perspective, or boundary of the other. According to Vincent Crapanzano, "Hermes, etymologically 'he of the stone heap', was associated with boundary stones" (1986: 52). The ethnographer "declares the limits" (52) of the horizon of the other, and this can only be done because the ethnographer already has a horizon out of which such a fusion, or interplay, or dialectic of horizons can occur. Hospitality to the stranger has a similar dialectic, as Thomas Ogletree points out (1985: 4):

My readiness to welcome the other into my world must be balanced by my readiness to enter the world of the other...In short, the ramifications of hospitality are not fully manifest unless I also know the meaning of being a stranger. Hospitality to the stranger points to an ongoing dialectic of host and stranger. It expresses a fundamental recognition of the world's plurality. The point is not that I may have no world of my own, nor that my world is unworthy of vigorous defense and advocacy...The promise borne by the reciprocal dialectic of host and stranger is the emergence of a new world of shared meanings.

Similarly, the interpathic self is willing to learn what it means to be a stranger in the world of the other. David Augsburger was cited earlier with regard to the continuity between philoxenia and interpathy (1986: 32):

Interpathic presence enters another world of human energies and risks, making the self available to entertain what was formerly alien, to be hospitable to what is utterly new.

Both in its content and also in its form, then, this thesis is concerned with the hermeneutical de-centring of perspective. Like philoxenia and interpathy, it is based on an ethnographic de-centring of the researcher's perspective in order to give attention to the perspectives of cultural insiders at Riverstane Church, and yet without blurring the boundary between the self and the other. At the same time the process has a cathartic effect for those who are cultural insiders (as described on pages 141-142 and 145 above). In that sense the hermeneutic is also therapeutic. This thesis, then, is essentially hermeneutical and pastoral both in its interpretation and in its practical theological reflection.

Of course, the thesis does not contain the interpretation, but an interpretation, and other researchers would have made other interpretations depending on their horizons and their choice of research focus. This leads to the question of what other foci might be, or what this thesis might suggest for possible future research. Given that it was in the final chapter alone that the pastoral context was discussed here, since the research was centred upon ordinary congregants at Riverstane, an alternative might be to focus upon the role of the minister in any church with regard to the shaping of congregational culture. Related to this might be a focus on culture change within congregations, rather than the theme of resistance to change which arose in Chapter Eight. Again, given that one of the emphases here was the micro-politics of what happens across symbolic boundaries, another approach might be to focus more closely on the social psychology of the congregation in terms of its group dynamics and micro-politics within symbolic boundaries. Further, in contrast to the approach taken here, a focus upon congregants' expressions of spirituality, or interpretations with regard to tenets of the faith, or the content of their interpretations of Christian symbolism in the church, would be worthwhile as a comparative study

alongside the focus chosen by Peter Stromberg in his ethnography of the congregation at Immanuelskyrkan (1986). Lastly, other useful comparative work would be to study congregations which meet in buildings of a similar character to Riverstane Church, or in similar contexts, such as 'First Presbyterian' churches or cathedral churches in Scotland or elsewhere.

This thesis has sought to build on the growing literature in congregational studies as a form of hermeneutical Practical Theology by attempting a more thoroughly ethnographic approach than is usually adopted. In doing so it was possible to describe the hermeneutically conceived nature of ethnography, to reflect more adequately upon what it means to speak of congregational culture, and to be informed by the perspectives of congregants rather than imposing pre-formulated categories or structures from the beginning. From a practical theological perspective, it was possible to reflect on congregational mission and on the pastoral context in terms of symbolic and personal boundaries in light of the micro-politics and status economics of the congregation.

At the end of Chapter Nine it was noted that neighbour-love is the Christian dynamic for interpathy, as it is for philoxenia, and indeed for the de-centering of perspective in general, but without entailing either a narcissistic blurring of boundaries, or self-alienation. At a collective level, Thiselton discusses this de-centring in terms of the challenge of the cross to the exclusivities of the Christian community (1992: 609, 617):

Love represents the major transforming force of all systems and criteria of relevance. Interests which have hitherto gathered round the self as a system of self-centred relevance begin to be re-grouped and re-ranked round the self of another, or even the Other... The goal of transformation into the image of Christ is to see the world through the eyes and interests of God's purposes for the world...The cross, we have said, relativizes and calls into question the respective

corporate claims and corporate self-interests of Jews and Gentiles, male and female, slave and free. As Paul argues throughout Romans, it places Jewish Christian and Gentile Christian, Jew and Gentile, precisely on the same footing as debtors to divine grace. On such a basis different cultural traditions are to "accept one another" (Romans 15.7).

Thiselton's words are a fitting expression of the necessity for all congregations, and not only Riverstane Church in its particularity, to be places where philoxenia and interpathy are at home. While in certain respects Riverstane is like no other congregation and is like some other congregations, it is also like all other congregations with respect to the imperative and indicative of its Christian identity, as people who are to be motivated by their experience of the love of God in the practice of philoxenia and interpathy.

It is not that congregational culture at Riverstane, or any other church, can ever be fully consistent with the kingdom of God, but rather that it must continually be transformed through the fusion of its horizon with the narratives of the kingdom and of the people of God. A congregation, to adapt Stroup's words (1981: 260), is a community which lives in "the tension between past and future, between memory and hope." It has both a present 'already' and eschatological 'not yet', and in that sense the hermeneutically conceived ethnographic and practical theological approach of this thesis has been concerned ultimately with Christian hope, with transformation, and with future possibility.

APPENDIX 1: TABLE OF INTERVIEWEE CATEGORIES

	<u>Interviews</u>	<u>Male/Female</u>	<u>Approx. Age</u>	<u>Approx. Years There</u>
A	4	F	70	10
B	4	F	70	10
C	5	M	75	10
D	5	F	75	10
E	5	M	70	50
F	6	M	85	35
G	6	F	60	35
H	4	F	80	15
I	5	F	70	10
J	4	F	70	5
K	3	F	55	15
L	5	M	80	20
M	5	F	80	20
N	4	F	80	15
O	2	M	55	30
P	1	F	60	5
Q	1	F	45	15
R	2	M	90	50
S	2	F	70	30
T	1	F	35	10
20	52	14F + 6M	1@35 1@45 2@50+ 2@60 14@65+	2@ 5 6@10 6@15-20 6@30+

Interviewed together as family members or social affines:
A+B, C+D, F+G, L+M, R+S

Interviewed alone: E, H, I, J, K, N, O, P, Q, T

APPENDIX 2: TWO SAMPLES OF INTERVIEW NOTES

SAMPLE ONE: INTERVIEW K.1.

Self: Describe what happens when you go to church on a typical Sunday morning.

K: I get the bus to church and get in at five to eleven. The organ is playing. On occasion an elder is at the door, but not always. You pull the door open yourself - the elder might be doing something else, like taking somebody in, and so not be at the door. Most times they smile and say hello - very brief. Then there's the magazine desk. I just pass in front of it and give a nod. I might get the [church magazine] on the way out. On the right, the children are getting ready to leave the church. There aren't many - mostly toddlers. On the way past I nod and smile to people, then cut through to the centre of the nave. At the crossing there are four elders - two on each side. We say good morning and smile, and I always ask for a large print hymnbook. I go round to the righthand side of the centre aisle, six rows from the back - just at the angle to see the pulpit. The view straight ahead is blocked by the pillar...

I sit down at about two minutes to. I look at the hymnbook to see who donated it, then if I know the person I think about them and say a prayer. After that there are a few minutes of calm. I only say 'Good morning' to people and don't talk before or during the service. I like to be quiet and the people sitting around are the same. There might be more visitors on the left hand side, and more chatting...

After the service I have a talk with people round about - ask how they are - and chat to people while making my way out by the ramp. Then in the nave I'll talk with the ones I know better for just a few minutes. I don't stop at the coffee stall and I'm out five minutes after the service finishes. People are getting out maybe to catch a bus, so we don't hold each other up. Maybe it's a bit selfish, but you have your routine...

I help at the visitor's desk twice a week and the shop once a month. I don't go to the [women's group] - I'm not so much of a joiner...

The people are reserved at [Riverstane]. They're very mannerly. But you'd never dream of making a joke with them in case they looked through you. It's a higher social level - people who've held elevated positions in their lives and they've been associated with [Riverstane] a long time. There's not so many of them now. I used to think [Riverstane] was stuck-up. It

is a bit stuck-up but there's not so many of them now. They don't want to associate with folk other than themselves...

People can be left standing on their own. It's a shame when some older people get missed out - neglected people who might need a hand on their way out. Some people are very good at helping, but there should be elders looking out for them too. The elders should do more than just standing there and watching each other - there's no spontaneous actions to help people...

You tend not to be approached by people in [Riverstane] although they will try to recruit you to join outside things like the St Andrew's Society. It's not like a normal church where there's warmth. The coldness is remarked upon by a lot of people of different ages. People are proud about being members of [Riverstane]. It's a ritual for them. People don't go to the prayers through the week. They just go on a Sunday - it's just a routine. People at [Riverstane] stand on ceremony all the time. They're not on the same wavelength as you. People don't really know each other.

SAMPLE TWO: INTERVIEW J.4.

Self: So far we've talked about before and after the Sunday morning service. Tell me what happens in between the two.

J: People notice the procession. It's the signal that the service is about to begin. People will notice how many ministers there are that day, but they don't pay much more attention. It's not of any great importance. It's formal - sombre. When [one of the ministers] starts the prayer that's the beginning. At first I didn't know what was going on when it was the prayer. But then I saw some folk were bowing their heads. It took me a long time before I knew what it was. I can't really make out what's being said except the chant bit at the end...

The congregation stands when the ministers walk down the centre aisle. In a normal church, an ordinary church, people wouldn't do that. It's because [Riverstone] is high - that's why we have all that bit. But the tendency nowadays is that people don't stand for things - we're all Jock Tamson's bairns. If the colours are being brought in, we stand then too, but that doesn't happen very often...

[The minister] welcomes people and then it's the opening hymn. You hope it's something you like and the tune's good and singable. Some of them are a bit off. If it's not good you just put up with it. The preamble at the beginning of the prayer is a bit airy-fairy. I don't know what that's all about - it's meaningless. A lot of people bow their heads at that point as if it's a prayer, but I don't. I don't mind a bit of ceremonial, but not that. It's over most people's heads. Your mind wanders, although sometimes you can't make out what [the minister] is saying...I don't understand the need for the sung amens. It doesn't happen in other churches...

We all ought to know what the procedure is, but there's a lot we don't know. The bit the choir sings - I don't know what it's about or where it's from. If it's a prose psalm then I'll look it up and follow it - it's the only way you can make out the words. When the choir sings it takes me a long time to work out what they're saying. It's a bit highbrow. Sometimes the sound is lovely, sometimes it's ghastly. But it's meaningless to me if I can't understand the words. From a religious, spiritual standpoint, that's alien to me. You're not being stirred. It should be soothing - nice to listen to without all this squealing...

Sometimes you don't make out the readings, sometimes you do. Then we stand for the creed. I couldn't recite it when I first came. I can relate to the prayer of intercession. It's straightforward and meaningful - you don't lose the place. The intimations are quite interesting to listen to. As well as dates, you sometimes get things about people who've died. Invariably I don't know who they are. Sometimes there's a big thing in the magazine about them - but then we didn't get that kind of magazine in other churches. It's usually two or three pages run off on the duplicator...

The invocation before the sermon - I've never heard that in any other church. In the sermon he does relate to the lives of other people. He's quite good at personalising things. It's usually quite famous people - achievers and sports personalities. It's quite interesting, although sometimes I think he goes on a bit about that. But he always brings it round in the end to the reading. You don't really lose interest. He doesn't read the sermon and that's quite important. He's a bit expressionless. Laid back. The sermon's just long enough. If anybody goes on too long I tend to be aware of it. If the delivery's good it makes a difference even when the content isn't so good. I do look forward to the sermon - you always get a message, or you should. To me it's important that there's some relevance to what's read. I do find it very meaningful. The ascription - I've no idea what that's all about. I'm not sure if that's something that could easily be missed. For me, I could do without that and the invocation...

The standing at the offering is a palaver. Again, it's something that could be left out. And standing for the prayer - it's quite a long stand. I would have thought we could sit down as soon as the offering is brought forward. You're down for two seconds and then back up for the hymn again. After the blessing the choir sings a blessing. A bit odd. Then we sit down until the beadle takes the lead. It's not well done. The congregation stands at different moments during this palaver. If we're doing ritual, then let's do it because it's got some sort of meaning - it should be properly done and we should all know the meaning. I think [the minister] is old-fashioned and ritualistic. You wonder what the next minister will be like. And who would you get? Invariably it would be an older, establishment person.

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